

Facilitating an Educational Development Initiative Focused on Reading Comprehension  
Instruction: Exploring University Professors' Experiences and Beliefs

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## **Abstract**

This qualitative exploratory case study focused on the experiences of university professors as they implemented reading comprehension instruction in their discipline-specific first- and second-year courses within the context of an educational development initiative. During 3 individual interviews, a pre-instructional dialogue, and 2 group sessions across 1 academic year, 5 professors reflected on their beliefs about reading and teaching as they engaged with planning and implementation of reading comprehension instruction. Collectively, participants appeared to plan comprehension instruction in ways consistent with their beliefs about academic reading, teaching first- and second-year students, and prior instructional approaches, and cited learning that challenged, confirmed, and/or intensified their pre-existing beliefs. Participants also suggested that a variety of formats for interaction and information dissemination during the educational development initiative were valuable in that they allowed for flexible facilitation. The study may offer insights into reading comprehension and its instruction within university courses as well as personalized educational development for university professors. Participants' beliefs, experiences, and meaning making processes are positioned as influences on learning, and participants' investments of self during educational development are emphasized. Implications for theory include the importance of acknowledging and honouring the complexities of professors' investments of self in the design and facilitation of initiatives. Related implications for practice include exploration of professors' beliefs, demonstrated respect and consideration, and responsive communication. Recommendations for future research include extension of the study's scope and lines of inquiry.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

Tremendous creative potential exists in first- and second-year university classrooms where professors, as higher order thinkers, self-regulated learners, and proficient readers (Alexander et al., 2011; Jackson, 2004; Lindholm, 2004) intersect with students at the thresholds of tertiary education. Much has been written about the challenges of teaching students who may be underprepared or resistant to reading (e.g., Côté & Allahar, 2011; Moje, Stockdill, Kim, & Kim, 2011; Mulcahy-Ernt & Caverly, 2009; Newson, 2004; Pawan & Honeyford, 2009; Popovic & Green, 2012; Tagg, 2003; Taraban, Rynearson, & Kerr, 2000). Less work, however, has focused on professors' attempts to enrich intersectional experiences with transitioning students through offering process-oriented instruction in areas such as metacognition and self-regulation within the contexts of their discipline-specific courses (e.g., Altun & Büyükduman, 2007; Mulcahy-Ernt & Caverly, 2009; Roberts & Roberts, 2008; Wingate, 2007).

Some professors may categorize learning how to learn as “skill work” and relegate it to earlier years of education, arguing that university courses are inappropriate venues for what may be seen as remedial instruction (Chalmers & Fuller, 1999). Other professors who embrace the notion of assisting students in their transitions to tertiary education may wish to offer assistance with reading comprehension, for example, but feel that they lack the training or background necessary to do so effectively. Educational development, frequently offered through institutional centres for teaching and learning, may provide support for professors addressing pedagogical challenges including integrating unfamiliar instruction in their courses (Adams, 2009; Åkerlind, 2005).

Educational development initiatives that are perceived by professors to address their learning and teaching needs, and that emphasize learning through dialogic

interaction and reflection, may provide meaningful and pragmatic support for professors (Amundsen & Wilson, 2012; Dee & Daly, 2009). Exploration of professors' experiences during educational development initiatives may yield valuable insights into university instruction as well as perspectives on educational development that may enrich the literature on design and facilitation. The study presented here describes one such exploration.

### **Background for the Study**

Although increasing numbers of North American students enrol in university programs each year (National Center for Educational Studies, 2015b; Statistics Canada, 2009), many do not complete their degrees (Conley, 2007; National Center for Educational Studies, 2015a). Dropout rates are noticeably high in the early years (McCarthy & Kuh, 2006; Wingate, 2007) when some students struggle with adjustment to university life. Among these struggles, students may experience difficulties with the challenges of academic study (Cohen, 2008), including processing assigned reading (Conley, 2007; Gruenbaum, 2012; Hoeft, 2012; Paulson & Armstrong, 2011; Wingate, 2007).

Much of university study involves text-based learning assigned in the form of extensive independent reading (Conley, 2007; Joliffe & Harl, 2008; Pugh, Pawan, & Antommarchi, 2000). Textbooks and other course materials are often “an integral course component providing the linkage between lectures, assignments and examinations” (Berry, Cook, Hill, & Stevens, 2011, p. 31), and it is commonly expected that most university students will thrive in a text-based approach to learning (Freebody & Freiberg, 2011; Mulcahy-Ernt & Caverly, 2009; Pawan & Honeyford, 2009). However, as many



students may not have received formal reading instruction since grade 6 (Alexander, 2005), they may not be prepared to approach university-level reading assignments effectively. It is also common for the academic community to express concern about students' preparedness to engage with a text-based approach to learning, particularly in first- and second-year studies (Badger, 2008; Côté & Allahar, 2007). As first- and even second-year students adjust to unfamiliar reading practices, they may benefit from guidance as they develop strategies for effective and independent reading (Alexander, 2005).

Traditionally, assistance in reading has been offered through learning centers on university campuses or in specialized standalone remedial courses (Stahl & King, 2009; Wingate, 2007). Another possibility involves professors addressing the nature of comprehension required for university-level reading in their discipline-specific courses. While the importance of professorial involvement in discipline-specific reading instruction has been well documented (e.g., Nel, Dreyer, & Kopper, 2004; Shepherd, Selden, & Selden, 2009; Smith, Holliday, & Austin, 2010; Taraban et al., 2000), as has the importance of providing instruction in strategy use (Holschuh & Aultman, 2009; Simpson & Nist, 2000), there seems to be limited evidence that such instruction in reading is being provided in first- and second-year courses. Comparatively little research has examined the experiences and the educational development needs of professors as they integrate such instruction in their discipline-specific courses. This study provided an opportunity to undertake such an examination.

### **Research Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the experiences of university professors as they implemented reading comprehension instruction in their existing discipline-specific first- and second-year courses within the context of an educational development initiative. This initiative emerged from participants' daily teaching practices, thus providing an opportunity for exploration and development that could be perceived as more localized than programming delivered through formalized centers for teaching and learning. Amundsen and Wilson (2012) identified the importance of educational development situated in authentic contexts in which "individual meaning making" and "a questioning orientation to teaching and learning" are given priority (p. 108). Educational development that focuses on faculty members' needs for "growth, achievement, and collegial connection" (Dee & Daly, 2009, p. 2) may provide opportunities for faculty to reflect on their work, to identify areas of strength, and to initiate learning about unfamiliar processes that they believe will help to improve their teaching practices (Dee & Daly, 2009). To that end, this study prioritized the flexibility required to facilitate co-construction of knowledge (Brown, 2012; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and acknowledged the relativity and uncertainty inherent in qualitative inquiry (Brown, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

As reading plays a particularly personal and integral role in academic study (Mann, 2000; Pawan & Honeyford, 2009), the beliefs of professors about reading and teaching reading were explored, particularly in terms of the interconnectedness between beliefs and instructional planning. Such exploration located the study within participants' lived experiences, "where individual belief and action intersect with culture" (Denzin &

Lincoln, 2011, p. 14), thus aligning the study strongly with “the province” of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 14). The study focused on ways that professors’ espoused beliefs about reading were associated with their approaches to providing reading comprehension instruction and ways that their beliefs evolved as they participated in the educational development initiative. Such consideration of professors’ beliefs in the context of reading comprehension instruction provided potential for the emergence of insights about both comprehension instruction and the nature of effective educational development in this area.

### **Research Questions**

The overarching question guiding this research was: What are university professors’ experiences with, and responses to, an educational development initiative focused on reading comprehension instruction within first- and second-year courses? Associated questions included: What are university professors’ espoused beliefs about the nature of reading comprehension and its instruction in first- and second-year courses? How do university professors plan and enact reading comprehension instruction throughout an educational development initiative?

### **Researcher Positioning and Beliefs**

This research emerged from my work in a small university in which I taught first-year English courses for over 10 years. During that time, I engaged in many conversations with colleagues about students’ preparedness for university study, primarily within two contexts. The first context was a series of informal “shop talk” sessions during which colleagues gathered to discuss the craft of teaching. Over the 4 or 5 years during which I facilitated and participated in these informal discussions, a common

concern about students' reading abilities and challenges was identified. Specifically, colleagues expressed concern about students' noncompliance with reading assignments as well as their apparent struggles with understanding and synthesizing the content of readings. In the second context, I taught an academic reading and writing course delivered as an introduction to university-level study. The course was offered as a humanities elective, and the reading component, to my knowledge, was the only formal instruction in reading available to first- or second-year students in the university. As the course was offered as an elective in the humanities, I sought information from colleagues in several disciplines about their expectations of first- and second-year students that I used to inform the content of the course. The progression from these informal conversations with colleagues about reading to a more formal research project seemed natural as the foundation for inquiry and exploration of professors' beliefs about reading and approaches to comprehension instruction had been laid throughout our years of dialogue.

My existing role as a colleague of potential participants for this study required careful consideration of positioning as a researcher. My status as a colleague and, therefore, an "insider" familiar with the university and its daily operations provided an advantage in some ways as I began the study with some contextual understanding (Clegg & Stevenson, 2013). Simultaneously, however, being "a fish in the water, part of the habitus, with a feel for the rules of the game" (Clegg & Stevenson, 2013, p. 7) posed the potential for difficulties including bias and even blindness because of my engrained personal beliefs about the university and teaching (e.g., that professors are frequently underappreciated in increasingly corporate university environments, and that first- and

second-year students require particular academic guidance). As Clegg and Stevenson stated, however, “our insider status” as professors researching professors “is phenomenologically as well as theoretically inescapable” (p. 7). Therefore, clarification of my role in the study was essential.

As I had previously conducted a self-study on design and implementation of comprehension instruction in one of my own courses (Parr & Woloshyn, 2013), I decided not to position myself as a full participant in the educational development initiative during which participants would implement such instruction for the first time. Instead, I chose the role of invested facilitator and colleague, and, therefore, a co-creator of understandings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). While I guided the study, I also involved myself in dialogues about reading and its instruction and sought to learn from participants’ experiences, as well as my own, throughout the initiative. I conducted interviews, facilitated group sessions, and met informally one-to-one with participants as we simultaneously carried out our duties as professors throughout the academic year.

I approached this study with several propositions or theories (Yin, 2009) associated with the beliefs with which I conducted this research. Two of these propositions seem particularly relevant. First, in terms of the professoriate, the role that universities play in global societies is currently under public and administrative examination (Donoghue, 2008; Nussbaum, 2010; Readings, 1999). Professors’ work is being scrutinized and, in some instances, redefined (Donoghue, 2008; Readings, 1999; Washburn, 2005). As professors struggle to defend the validity of intellectual work in an increasingly corporate world, their autonomy and creativity as teachers seems to be under attack. One intention of this study was to integrate respect for professors’ autonomy, their

disciplinary expertise and personal approaches to teaching, and their individual beliefs about reading with a practical initiative that could assist them to provide instruction relevant to some of their current challenges without compromising the integrity of their course content.

Second, in terms of reading, it was assumed that most first- and second-year university students could benefit from assistance with reading comprehension (Wingate, 2007). Because reading assistance is best offered in close proximity to the context in which the reading will be utilized (Nel et al., 2004; Taraban et al., 2000), in this case within discipline-specific courses, it seemed that in-class instruction would offer the most effective assistance. Within the university in which this study was conducted, professors shared a commitment to helping students learn and were advantaged by small class sizes (frequently between 20 and 30 students). Because of their commitment to students and their ability to interact with them individually during class time, I believed that professors of first- and second-year students were well-positioned to offer such assistance.

### **Use of Terminology**

Throughout this dissertation, the term participants was used to describe the university professors who were willingly and cooperatively involved in the study (Merriam, 2009). The term professors was used to identify academics who teach within a university program and may conduct research in their areas of expertise, participate in service functions, and employ their disciplinary knowledge to connect with their communities (Kreber, 2010; O'Meara, Terosky, & Neumann, 2008). For the purposes of this study, emphasis was placed on the professors' teaching roles and, thus, all participants, whether tenured or sessional, were considered similarly employed. The term

educational development, synonymous with faculty or academic development, was used throughout this dissertation. Educational development is used most often in Canada to describe efforts to assist faculty in developing “learning and teaching capacity” (Taylor & Colet, 2010, p. 143). The term educational development initiative (or initiative) was used interchangeably with the term study to identify this research project. Finally, the term respect was used subjectively, in the sense of demonstrating consideration for individuals whom one takes seriously and deems worthy of esteem (Respect, n.d.).

### **Overview of Chapters**

Following this introduction, Chapter Two provides a review of literature relevant to the study, while Chapter Three describes the research design and methodology. Collectively, these three chapters provide a foundation for addressing the study’s research questions. Chapter Four provides findings in the form of narratives describing participants’ experiences, and Chapter Five provides analysis of within-group similarities. These two chapters address the research questions associated with participants’ beliefs and instructional experiences. Finally, Chapter Six contextualizes the research questions through discussion of implications for theory and practice, future research, and personal reflection.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

This study explored the experiences of university professors as they implemented reading comprehension instruction in first- and second-year courses within the context of an educational development initiative. In order to conduct such an exploration, it was necessary to draw upon research in several areas of educational study. Much research on reading comprehension and instruction, as well as teacher beliefs, has been conducted at the K-12 level. Many researchers of tertiary education have called attention to the rich body of work done with younger students and those who teach them and have relied upon it in their research (e.g., Alexander, 2005; Amundsen & Wilson, 2012; Entwistle & Walker, 2000; Kane, Sandretto, & Heath, 2002). This study follows their example and incorporates research conducted with younger students, as well as tertiary research, as sources of valuable information relevant to academia. This chapter discusses contexts for the study including theoretical orientation, reading comprehension and reading instruction, professors' beliefs, and educational development.

### **Theoretical Orientation**

This study stands upon four theories relevant to learning, including psychological constructivism (relevant to knowledge building), Alexander's (2005) lifespan developmental perspective on reading (relevant to comprehension), Jarvis's (2006) theory of human learning (relevant to personal growth), and Saroyan and Frenay's (2010) international model of educational development (relevant to professors' professional growth). Each theory is described briefly and its relevance to the study is explained.

### **Psychological Constructivism**

This study is aligned with constructivism in its concern with meaning making and knowledge construction associated with active, rather than passive, learning (Yilmaz,



2008). For the sake of clarification, Phillips (1995) categorized types of constructivism along axes or continua reflective of researchers' interests, but acknowledged that while a group of constructivists might agree along one axis or issue, the same constructivists might disagree along others. Following Phillips, this study can be positioned along a continuum of interest in the individual nature of knowledge construction, at one end, and the social nature of knowledge construction at the other, a continuum upon which "the construction of knowledge is an *active* process, but the activity can be described in terms of individual cognition or else in terms of social and political processes (or, of course, in terms of both) [original emphasis]" (Phillips, 1995, p. 9). This study might be positioned near the center of this axis in its acknowledgement of the influence of both individual and social construction of knowledge, thereby aligning it with the work of scholars whom Phillips labelled as psychological constructivists. Like Vygotsky, for example, psychological constructivists

primarily are interested in the development of knowledge within the individual, but... (in opposition, for example, to Piaget) want to stress the way in which individuals are influenced in the knowledge-constructing efforts by members of the social group to which they belong. (Phillips, 1997, p. 160)

Psychological constructivists have been characterized as those who believe that learners construct meaning "around phenomena" (Phillips, 2000, as cited in Yilmaz, 2008, p. 163). These constructions are "idiosyncratic, depending in part on the learners' background knowledge," but they can also be social in that shared meanings can become "formal knowledge" (Yilmaz, 2008, p. 163).

Insofar as this research is aligned with tenets of psychological constructivism, it stands upon the premise that learning occurs not only within individuals' minds but also during the course of active interactions with others and environments (Gordon, 2008; Prawat & Floden, 1994). Specifically, "knowledge evolves through a process of negotiation within discourse communities" and "the products of this activity... are influenced by cultural and historical factors" (Prawat & Floden, 1994, p. 37). As learning does not occur solely in isolation nor solely through social interaction, the dialogic interplay between information exchange and individual meaning making is essential to broadening individuals' knowledge bases (Mackeracher, 2004). Citing Freire's contribution to constructivist thinking, Gordon (2008) described knowledge-building as "a process of inquiry and creation, an active and restless process that human beings undertake to make some sense of themselves, the world, and the relationships between the two" (p. 324).

In constructivist pedagogy, learning is frequently associated with Vygotsky's zones of proximal development as well as the "mediational concepts" of scaffolding and apprenticeship, all premised upon guided but agentic learning directed toward the learners' appropriation and internalization of content (Kozulin, 2003, p. 9). Criteria for constructivist instruction include calling upon individuals' prior knowledge, creating cognitive dissonance (in which new information challenges prior knowledge), providing means of applying new knowledge with feedback, and encouraging reflection on learning (Baviskar, Hartle, & Whitney, 2009).

Constructivism informed this study in terms of its applicability to both student and professor learning. Discussions of reading comprehension instruction included

consideration of instructional design intended to lead to students' internalization of strategies and development of improved independent reading. In terms of professor learning, tenets of psychological constructivism were incorporated into the design of the educational development initiative with the intention that participants would learn from interactions with others, as well as through thoughtful reflection on their reading and teaching, and thereby would expand their knowledge (Altun & Büyükduman, 2007; Nie & Lau, 2010; Powell & Kalina, 2009).

### **Lifespan Developmental Perspective on Reading**

Foundational to this study is the perspective that various reading competencies may develop throughout individuals' lives and that the context-specific nature of particular reading needs influences the types of support and instruction required, concepts articulated in Alexander's (2005) model of lifespan reading development. The model draws on Alexander's Model of Domain Learning (1997) as well as literatures of developmental and cognitive psychology, "expertise, motivation, and domain-specific learning, as well as reading research" (Alexander, 2005, p. 415). The model describes the interplay of knowledge, interest, and strategies in various stages of reading development that progress from acclimation to early, middle, and late competence, and finally to proficiency or expertise (Alexander, 2005). The development of reading competence is influenced by increased knowledge of language and content domains, development of personal interest in reading, and changes in strategic processing (Alexander, 2005). Implicit in the model is the assertion that individuals may need to learn to read for particular situations using particular processes across the span of their lives, and that each

time they broaden their understanding of reading, they may need to acclimate to unfamiliar processes (Alexander, 2005).

Readers in acclimation may be seen as vulnerable because of their “limited knowledge, strategies, and interest” (Alexander, 2005, p. 430) and may, therefore, require guidance from more experienced readers. Instructors may help acclimating readers to build understanding of reading processes incorporating a repertoire of surface-level and deep-processing strategies used to develop content knowledge. Modelling a passion for reading and “a personal investment in the domain” (Alexander, 2005, p. 431) may inspire readers in acclimation to develop their own reading-related passions. Readers who are more competent may benefit from more experienced readers’ guidance as well, but those in acclimation are particularly vulnerable to developing increasing reading difficulties unless they receive assistance (Alexander, 2005).

In this study, Alexander’s (2005) model provided a framework for reading development relevant to students’ first- and second-year academic study in university, as well as professors’ educational development focused on deepening understanding of reading comprehension and its instruction. The model was utilized as a foundation for discussions of reading throughout the study.

### **Theory of Human Learning**

Jarvis’s (2006) theory of human learning resonates with this study in its recognition of the complexity of learning processes. Jarvis described learning as a combination of processes whereby the whole person – body (genetic, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and senses) – experiences a social situation, the perceived content of which is then

transformed cognitively, emotively or practically (or through any combination) and integrated into the person's individual biography resulting in a changed (or more experienced) person. (p. 10)

According to Jarvis, learning is a dynamic process where the life-world with which individuals interact changes, causing "disjunctural" or novel situations across time as individuals relate person to person, person to phenomenon, person to a future phenomenon, or person to self. During such moments of disjuncture, individuals transform experiences as learning occurs through thought, sensation, and action. The changes "memorized" by individuals (i.e., transformations) make them more experienced, with subsequent interactions with the life-world continuing to move them toward further moments of disjuncture (Jarvis, 2006). Types of learning depend upon the degree of harmony between individuals' biographies and their experiences with their worlds. In situations where no disjuncture occurs, or in situations where individuals have become desensitized, no learning, or nonlearning, may occur. Incidental learning may occur when individuals recognize disjuncture but are inhibited from learning by circumstances, such as lack of time or rejection of the disjunctural message. In this case, learning may still occur, but it may be incidental rather than purposeful. Learning may also be nonreflective, such as when individuals learn skills through imitation. On the other hand, learning may be thoughtful when individuals gain new knowledge, appreciation, and skills by carefully considering whether or not they will accept and utilize them. Once learning has occurred, individuals' "beliefs, values, or changed aspirations" may incite further disjuncture and lead to further learning (Jarvis, 2006, p. 25).

Jarvis's (2006) theory of human learning provided a framework for consideration of participants' learning in this study. Its complexity and scope seemed well-suited to the exploratory nature of a qualitative case study in which individual professors brought their own academic biographies to bear upon their instructional planning. The theory also provided parameters for description of participants' interactions during the educational development initiative as it simultaneously allowed for exploration of a variety of individual biographical revisions.

### **International Model of Educational Development**

The design of this study incorporated principles of educational development consistent with Saroyan and Frenay's (2010) comprehensive international model. The model was one of the products of a collaboration among faculty educational developers and professors desiring to create an internationally relevant faculty development program targeted at doctoral students interested in university pedagogy (Saroyan & Frenay, 2010). Within this model, educational development is viewed as an academic practice in which educational developers and colleagues work toward common goals (Taylor & Colet, 2010). Educational developers require knowledge of teaching and learning, academic cultures, and leadership which they frequently gain through experience rather than formal training (Taylor & Colet, 2010). The model argues that teaching capacities may be strengthened through educational developers "working in the local context, using and generating evidence-based knowledge, maintaining a focus on learning, and respecting collegiality" (Taylor & Colet, 2010, p. 147). The model was relevant to this study in terms of the intentionality to work collegially with professors as well as the focus on learning and respect. It also was relevant in terms of the study's acknowledgement of the

context in which educational development occurs, commitment to “systematic use of sound research and best practices” (Taylor & Colet, 2010, p. 147), and acceptance of diversity among professors and their approaches to teaching. My role in the study as invested facilitator and colleague and, therefore, a co-creator of understanding, incorporated elements of both educational developer and professorial roles.

### **Reading Comprehension and Reading Instruction**

This study emerged from a desire to work with professors to address students’ reading comprehension in discipline-specific courses. Central to the study was an educational development initiative that invited participants to think and learn about comprehension and its instruction in the context of their own academic experiences. This section discusses processes of comprehension and expectations for university-level reading, first- and second-year students as transitioning readers, and comprehension instruction in university contexts.

#### **Reading Comprehension**

Reading comprehension has been defined as “the strategic reconstruction of a text toward a particular purpose” (Calfee, 2009, p. xiii) and is, therefore, associated with several processes. In order to comprehend text, readers need to “decode words, understand vocabulary, read fluently, have adequate background knowledge, think critically, understand various text structures, and be motivated to read” (Parris & Block, 2008, p. 381), all of which require cognitive, metacognitive, and affective components of strategy use. Cognitive strategies are “mental routines or procedures for accomplishing cognitive goals” (Dole, Nokes, & Drets, 2009, p. 348) and, in the case of comprehension, include strategies such as generating questions, constructing mental images, activating

prior knowledge and drawing inferences, rereading difficult passages, identifying the main idea, and predicting or summarizing text (Dole et al., 2009; Hock & Mellard, 2005).

Metacognition involves both awareness of cognition and the ability to regulate cognition (Holschuh & Aultman, 2009). Metacognitive strategies “allow individuals to monitor and assess their ongoing performance in accomplishing a cognitive task” and are often described in relation to monitoring reading comprehension (Dole et al., 2009, p. 349). The study of metacognition has been based upon constructivism and acknowledges readers’ abilities to construct meaning from text actively (Baker & Beall, 2009), often by identifying confusing passages and employing strategies to acquire comprehension. Metacognition has been found to work in conjunction with cognition and motivation to influence comprehension (Baker, 2008).

It has long been acknowledged that strategic reading requires motivation as well as skilled comprehension (Allgood, Risko, Alvarez, & Fairbanks, 2000; Almasi, 2003; Holschuh & Aultman, 2009; Miller & Faircloth, 2009; Reed, Schallert, Beth, & Woodruff, 2004). Multiple factors influence readers’ motivation including choice, challenge, and control over the reading being performed (Holschuh & Aultman, 2009; Reed et al., 2004). Discourse can affect motivation positively as discussion of text with peers may make reading more interesting, and feedback from peers often is perceived as valuable (Almasi, 2003; Holschuh & Aultman, 2009). Other factors that may affect motivation positively are goal setting and achievement, self-regulated learning, and effective use of strategies (Allgood et al., 2000; Holschuh & Aultman, 2009).

Self-regulated learning is a variable, “complex, interactive process involving not only metacognitive components but also motivational and behavioral components”



(Zimmerman, 1995, p. 220). Self-regulation “refers to processes that learners use to activate and maintain cognitions, emotions, and behaviors to attain personal goals”

(Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2014, p. 145). Setting goals and regulating oneself to achieve them requires motivation and control of “cognitions, emotions, and environments”

(Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2014, p. 145). The need for university students to become self-regulated learners is “undeniable” as self-regulation has been linked with academic success and “affects motivation, emotions, selection of strategies, and effort regulation and leads to increases in self-efficacy and improved academic achievement”

(Bembenutty, 2011, pp. 3-4).

Flexible strategy use is widely acknowledged as an essential component of effective reading that can contribute to deep comprehension (Caverly, Nicholson, & Radcliffe, 2004; Holschuh & Aultman, 2009; Simpson & Nist, 2000; Taraban et al., 2000). During the last 3 decades, a large body of research on strategy use, largely within K-12 contexts, has been built upon principles of good reading established by studying the habits of successful readers (e.g., Alexander & Jetton, 2000; Pressley & Wharton-McDonald, 1997; Simpson & Nist, 2000). Good readers use strategies before, during, and after reading and are motivated by their beliefs that strategic reading assists them to read more effectively (Hilden & Pressley, 2007).

Deep reading comprehension requires various abilities consistent with cognitive strategy use (Dole et al., 2009). Skilled readers approach text purposefully and interact with it “on a number of levels” (Pressley & Wharton-McDonald, 1997, p. 450), reading with goals in mind. Skilled readers look for context clues to the meaning of unfamiliar words and “attempt to relate important points in text to one another, activating prior

knowledge related to the text content to do so” (Pressley & Wharton-McDonald, 1997, p. 450). Readers with high levels of comprehension make inferences by considering various interpretations and “construct hypotheses and conclusions throughout reading” (Pressley & Wharton-McDonald, 1997, p. 451). In contrast, readers who employ surface approaches to comprehension may focus on completing isolated tasks and memorizing, rather than synthesizing, information (Holschuh & Aultman, 2009).

Reading comprehension requires cognitive organization and flexibility that can improve with age, support, and practice (Cartwright, 2009). Awareness and utilization of the cognitive, metacognitive, and affective components of strategy use may result in students creating and employing their own generative strategies, an ultimate goal of instruction (Francis & Simpson, 2009; Holschuh & Aultman, 2009). Students who understand text use higher levels of metacognitive knowledge about reading and evaluate and adjust their cognitive processes during reading more effectively than their peers who do not demonstrate such understanding (Baker & Beall, 2009). Motivated students may engage with reading strategies that help them to discover personal significance in texts and help them to become committed to them; commitment to texts can contribute to better reading performance (Miller & Faircloth, 2009).

Although specific elements of comprehension development can be identified and predicted, there is no one continuum of stages followed by all students. Instead, there are several paths to comprehension affected by a variety of individual circumstances (Duke & Carlisle, 2011). As text, reader, and context interact during the construction of textual meaning, conscious and subconscious use of strategies can be enhanced through social interaction as well as instruction. Duke and Carlisle consider comprehension “a

quintessential growth construct” (p. 200), suggesting that comprehension development is never complete.

### **Expectations for University-Level Reading**

In general, university students are expected to engage with text through “analysis, synthesis, and evaluation” and during the process of constructing meaning, embed “ideas in *semantic* memory [original emphasis]” (Roberts & Roberts, 2008, pp. 129-130). Such engagement with text requires critical thinking, often applied to more than one text concurrently. Critical thinking is an increasingly important ability that enriches students’ over-all participation in academic courses (Maclellan, 2015).

While critical thinking has always been an important outcome in higher education, the context in which we now live (of vast amounts of easily accessible information of very variable quality) underlines its importance. Learners need not only to search for information to build new knowledge, but also to evaluate the veracity of the information and the credibility of its sources. (Maclellan, 2015, p. 178)

Readings from multiple sources representing a variety of perspectives may be assigned in university courses. Rather than reading simply from one textbook, students may be expected to read from several primary and secondary sources in each course (Simpson, Stahl, & Francis, 2004) and synthesize the information in written or oral presentations (Maclellan, 2015). Such synthesis of ideas involves utilization of “prior knowledge, self-regulatory skill, an appreciation of the contextual nature of the language and the facility to draw inferences and make inter-textual connections” (Maclellan, 2015, p. 175).

Students who engage critically with assigned readings in university courses benefit from

enhanced potential for participating in class discussions, increased possibility of understanding the class lectures, and enriched learning of the course content (MacLellan, 2015; Sappington, Kinsey, & Munsayac, 2002; Svensson, Anderberg, Alvegard, & Johansson, 2009).

In association with critical thinking abilities, engagement with assigned readings requires several other attributes. Among these, active reading is necessary in order to understand text structure and recognize key ideas (Mulcahy-Ernt & Caverly, 2009). Questioning, a reading comprehension strategy, can assist students to review and clarify their understanding of content (Mulcahy-Ernt & Caverly, 2009). Because students are often required to read independently and synthesize ideas in various expressive formats, appreciation for reading/writing connections is essential (Jackson, 2009). Extensive receptive and expressive vocabularies and knowledge of strategies for approaching unfamiliar terminology are also essential to reading engagement, particularly with complex texts (Francis & Simpson, 2009; Simpson & Randall, 2000).

As students entering university are frequently required to enrol in several introductory courses in various disciplines, they may be expected to familiarize themselves with a variety of textual structures and reading conventions simultaneously (Pawan & Honeyford, 2009). Students may be assigned readings in traditional textbooks, readers, trade books, or journal articles that differ in format, organization, perspective, vocabulary, and expression of ideas, depending upon their disciplines (Pugh et al., 2000; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Students may be expected to adopt the practices of experienced disciplinary readers whose approaches may be influenced by their epistemologies and training relevant to the “intellectual values of a discipline and the

methods by which scholarship is created” (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008, p. 50). For example, historians, recognizing that truth is constructed, may read with attention to the biases of an author in order to evaluate evidence. They may also place individual events within broader contexts and connect phenomena in order to develop perspective (Hounsell & Anderson, 2009). On the other hand, experienced readers of English literature, focusing on the importance of text and context, may emphasize close, analytical reading, construction of arguments, and perspectives of literary criticism in order to evaluate the validity of interpretations (Donald, 2002; Foster, 2003). In the social sciences, experienced readers, recognizing that “knowledge in their disciplines is time- and culture-dependent” (Donald, 2002, p. 133), may seek out multiple perspectives on topics and synthesize ideas from several sources in order to engage in multifaceted thinking (Donald, 2002).

### **First- and Second-Year Students as Transitioning Readers**

Against a backdrop of rigorous expectations for students entering universities, students themselves may perceive university study differently than their professors. Newson (2004) characterized students as “‘autonomous choosers’ in the educational products market” who may enter university with a consumerist attitude that affects their perceptions of course selection and content, grading, and personal responsibility for attendance and studying (p. 230). Students may be disengaged with their required courses and with classroom environments that encourage deep learning, resulting in alienation and stress (Côté & Allahar, 2011). Students may often prioritize earning the credential, rather than deep learning, as their primary goal in university study (Côté & Allahar, 2011; Fitzgerald, 2014; Roberts & Roberts, 2008).

An apparent preference for efficient earning of credentials, and, therefore, surface learning, may not be a matter of student choice exclusively, however. Students may have adopted “global mindsets to academic tasks, to studying and school work” within contexts of formal education that encourage surface learning (Tagg, 2003, p. 82). Surface learning is characterized by static reception of “discrete bits of data” as well as a focus on tasks themselves, and it may provide an unpleasant experience (Tagg, 2003, p. 81). Students who have not been encouraged to engage with active or deep learning may adopt a surface orientation to education that may continue throughout university study (Popovic & Green, 2012; Tagg, 2003).

Clearly, not all students perceive university study negatively or are unprepared to participate effectively. Regardless of their goals and prior educational experiences, however, first- and second-year university students may face particular challenges when transitioning from secondary to postsecondary education—a complex, unfamiliar academic environment in which they are expected to participate fully and immediately (Francis & Simpson, 2009; Pawan & Honeyford, 2009). Researchers have estimated that of the total “gains students make in knowledge and cognitive skill development” during university, more than two thirds occurs during the first two years of study (Reason, Terenzini, & Domingo, 2006, p. 149), thus positioning the early years of university as critical to “laying the foundation on which [students’] subsequent academic success and persistence rest” (Reason et al., 2006, p. 150). One of students’ challenges is the need to meet rigorous academic expectations, largely by reading and learning independently (Donald, 2002; Halpern, 1998). Deep reading comprehension is required in order for students to navigate through reading assignments and to function as creative, critical

thinkers in university studies (Pawan & Honeyford, 2009). From a cognitive perspective, first- and second-year university students are encouraged to engage in forms of active reading, higher order thinking, and critical response that satisfy criteria for engaged learning (Donald, 2002; Halpern, 1998). However, students may experience difficulties meeting these criteria as the volume of reading, the diversity of topics, and the variety of assigned tasks may make significant demands on students' cognitive processing abilities (Taraban et al., 2000).

Although university students are often referred to as adult learners, most first- and second-year students are completing adolescence and entering into young adulthood (Alexander & Fox, 2011). As such, their development as adults is just beginning and some of their physical and cognitive development is still emerging (Alexander & Fox, 2011). Alexander and Fox identified several developmental processes that occur in typical adolescents. These include biophysiological (puberty and brain development), cognitive (increased thought capacity, knowledge automaticity, and self-awareness), psychosocial (identity development, self and social development), and contextual changes (moves to unfamiliar school environments). Alexander and Fox associated these developmental processes with corresponding reading abilities and comprehension development in order to position adolescents as developing readers. For example, biophysiological, as the density of grey and white matter in the brain changes, adolescents develop the ability to self-regulate and, therefore, may monitor their comprehension more effectively. Their "increased working memory capacity" may be "related to improved reading comprehension" (Alexander & Fox, 2011, p. 159). Cognitively, adolescents may develop increased capacity for content knowledge,

automaticity, and “strategic flexibility” that may be evident as “aspects of inferential and elaborative comprehension” develop during adolescence and beyond (Alexander & Fox, 2011, p. 159). As late adolescents, first- and second-year students may be described as developing readers in the sense that abilities necessary for effective university-level reading may still be emergent in their cognitive development.

Alexander’s (2005) lifespan developmental perspective on reading can be used to position first- and second-year students as travellers along a continuum of experience that ranges from acclimation to proficiency/expertise in terms of knowledge acquisition, interest, and strategic processing. Readers in acclimation are likely to possess limited domain and topic knowledge, while proficient readers’ language facility and conceptual knowledge contribute to their comprehension. Readers in acclimation often possess situational interest in reading, while proficient readers have developed individual interest that is important to motivation. Finally, readers in acclimation tend to employ surface-level strategies to solve reading problems, while proficient readers choose from a repertoire of surface-level and deep-processing strategies to aid in comprehension (Alexander, 2005). Studies have found that as students’ knowledge, interest, and strategic processing develop, their interaction with text becomes increasingly successful (Alexander, 2005). Although students may enter university as proficient readers of familiar material, they may well find themselves in a state of acclimation when presented with the rigorous demands of university reading and discipline-specific texts (Alexander, 2005; Moje et al., 2011; Mulcahy-Ernt & Caverly, 2009; Pawan & Honeyford, 2009). In order to read effectively in academia, students need to develop and integrate domain knowledge and knowledge about academic reading, acquire interest in various disciplines



and their topics, and hone the ability to use strategies effectively. As they do so, they may move from acclimation toward competence and perhaps proficiency/expertise (Alexander, 2005).

In its positioning of reading development across the lifespan, Alexander's (2005) model provides a framework for discussion of students, who may be in acclimation as they adjust to academic reading, as well as professors, who are likely proficient or expert academic readers. The model acknowledges that readers in acclimation, a vulnerable position, require "care and guidance" from those more familiar with "routines and rituals that are part of the domain culture" (Alexander, 2005, p. 430), in this case professors, and that without this guidance, readers may struggle with comprehension and strategy use. The model does not, however, elucidate the student-professor relationship further by providing details of this necessary guidance, particularly as it might be relevant to university students, nor does it discuss educational development support that might be useful for professors wishing to guide students through acclimation.

In addition to cognitive and experiential factors affecting students' reading, biographical and sociopolitical realities of academic reading are important to understanding what reading means to undergraduate students and consequently why they read (or do not read) in the ways that they do (Mann, 2000). Reading for university courses becomes a public process, "evaluated through examinations, projects, essays, and seminar discussions" (Mann, 2000, p. 312). Thus, private reading often turns public and is judged through tasks largely determined by others who hold positions of power (Mann, 2000). These judgements may affect the ways students see themselves in relation to the norm established by more experienced readers (Mann, 2000). When they perceive that

they are not succeeding, they may become threatened by the demands of academic reading and avoid completing assignments (Mann, 2000).

Students' noncompliance with reading assignments is a current topic of concern in tertiary education research. Several studies report that the majority of students do not complete assigned reading before classes (Berry et al., 2011; Burchfield & Sappington, 2000; Lei, Bartlett, Gorney, & Herschbach, 2010; Pecorari, Shaw, Irvine, Malmström, & Mežek, 2012), and many students fail even to obtain the required course texts. In one representative study, approximately 60% of the undergraduate students enrolled in finance courses in three United States universities reported that they spent 1 hour or less per week reading their finance textbooks, and most of those who read the textbook did so after classes (Berry et al., 2011). Although professors recommended that the textbook should be read before classes, students did not consider reading textbooks as an important contributor to learning, and many perceived textbooks as a substitute for lectures (Berry et al., 2011). Students felt that they were busy and, therefore, perceived reading as an extraneous activity. They expressed a desire to receive key information about core concepts rather than being presented with a broad array of materials as part of their courses (Berry et al., 2011). Although there was no mention of professors explaining why textbooks should be read before classes, nor how students might read most effectively, the reporting of widespread noncompliance raises the issue of interaction between noncompliance and noncomprehension. Students need to read in order to determine their level of comprehension, yet lack of comprehension may influence lack of compliance. This predicament may be even more problematic in that student self-reports of reading compliance are not considered a reliable indicator of reading itself, as students' reports of

preparation may be more positive than “empirical measures of compliance” (Sappington et al., 2002, p. 273).

### **Reading Instruction in University Contexts**

According to constructivist theories, “learning is an active process of knowledge construction and meaning making by the learner” (Nie & Lau, 2010, p. 411). Drawing on prior experience, learners may construct “meaningful representations of knowledge” (Nie & Lau, 2010, p. 412) through individual cognition and social interaction (Altun & Büyükduman, 2007; Powell & Kalina, 2009). Learning how to construct meaningful knowledge, often including processes of reading independently and discussing assigned reading in class, is one of the goals and challenges of university study (Roberts & Roberts, 2008). One way that professors may assist students with knowledge construction is by addressing concepts of metacognition and self-regulation in their courses (Altun & Büyükduman, 2007; Roberts & Roberts, 2008; Wingate, 2007). Doing so may help students to take ownership of their own learning and to regulate it by employing specific processes such as metalearning.

Metalearning has been described by Jackson (2004) as a “subconcept within metacognition and self-regulation” (p. 398) and is important in order “to learn and learn better” (p. 391). In an early discussion of the term, Biggs (1985) defined metalearning as referring “specifically to learning and study processes in institutional settings, and more particularly to students’ *awareness* of their motives, and *control* over their strategy selection and deployment [original emphasis]” (p. 192). Jackson (2004) labelled metalearning as “a necessity if one is to take control of one’s own learning and create plans and strategies in order to achieve desired goals” (p. 393). Carnell (2007) discussed

the importance of encouraging metalearning among students, particularly as a contribution to classrooms in which “learning itself is a focus of learning” (p. 39). Meyer and Norton (2004) argued that metalearning is as important to student success as “mastery of specific subject content, epistemologies and discipline mores” (p. 389).

As traditional text-based assignments are still a common reading requirement in first- and second-year courses (Pawan & Honeyford, 2009), and as many students may access text using multiple sources requiring various types of reading processes (Pawan & Honeyford, 2009), it seems important to consider methods of support for students, including strategy instruction, as they continue to develop comprehension skills related to processing traditional academic texts. Transitioning students may have become proficient with strategies for surface learning, such as reading to memorize and recount information, rather than strategies for deep learning such as constructing meaning and developing arguments (Roberts & Roberts, 2008). Although deep comprehension is frequently required, many beginning university students do not read with effective comprehension strategies (Roberts & Roberts, 2008).

In order to promote students’ active use of generative comprehension strategies, instruction in strategic reading should include several components (Holschuh & Aultman, 2009; Simpson & Nist, 2000). Before implementing strategy instruction in their courses, professors should “employ metacognitive reflection” on their own reading strategies (Roberts & Roberts, 2008, p. 126). A variety of strategies should be defined and described for students, and their use should be justified and explained through modelling, often provided in think-aloud protocols, and examples. Practice with challenging authentic texts should be guided (Holschuh & Aultman, 2009; Simpson & Nist, 2000),

and strategy use should be evaluated and reinforced (Holschuh & Aultman, 2009).

Equally important, the introduction of strategic reading needs to include scaffolding, the gradual decrease of instructional control over time, so that strategy use may become generative (Holschuh & Aultman, 2009).

Block and Duffy (2008) described theoretical movement away from individual strategies taught in isolation to repertoires of strategies taught in authentic contexts. Culled over time from a lengthy list, nine comprehension strategies have been identified as effective and are now considered most appropriate for instruction: prediction, monitoring, questioning, imaging, re-reading, inferring, summarizing and drawing conclusions, evaluating, and synthesizing (Block & Duffy, 2008). Additionally, Block and Duffy characterized comprehension as a fluid process focused on reading strategically rather than working one's way through a series of isolated strategies. The emphasis on flexibility and fluidity seems particularly relevant to comprehension in reading for university contexts, where students are expected to navigate independently through a variety of assignments in various disciplines. In their discussion of strategy instruction in university contexts, Holschuh and Aultman (2009) identified three criteria used in selecting appropriate strategies for instruction: (a) they should include cognitive, metacognitive, and affective elements, (b) instructors should be able to scaffold them, and (c) students should be able to test themselves on their effectiveness. In their list of strategies that meet these criteria and may improve comprehension, Holschuh and Aultman included use of graphic organizers, concept mapping, content previews, isolating important information, annotation, elaborative interrogation, and elaborative verbal rehearsals.

Mulcahy-Ernt and Caverly (2009) emphasized the importance of self-regulation for university study and suggested that professors need to encourage students' development of agency and engagement. Professors can encourage students to select and monitor strategies for their effectiveness in response to specific tasks and can help students to build their declarative and procedural knowledge about strategy use. Finally, professors can also provide important feedback and initiate discussion about strategy use (Mulcahy-Ernt & Caverly, 2009). Wilkinson and Son (2011) argued that dialogic strategy instruction should emphasize the importance of multiple perspectives in a context of "content-rich instruction, discussion argumentations, and intertextuality" (p. 367). When professors communicate information about "more sophisticated ways of knowing," students can become deeper processors of ideas; in other words, epistemological beliefs and strategies can be taught (Holschuh & Aultman, 2009, p. 128).

Acknowledging that first- and second-year students may need guidance as they become familiar with university-level reading and indicating willingness to provide that guidance through strategic reading instruction are only the first steps toward integrating such instruction in discipline-specific courses. Several challenges associated with strategy instruction have been identified in the literature. For instance, the strategies themselves may not be as important to improved comprehension as is purposeful interaction with text that may trigger strategy use among readers (Alvermann & Eakle, 2003). Additionally, there is no guarantee that, even after careful instruction, students will use strategies in the long term or will be able to accept ownership of strategies and apply them to other appropriate reading situations (Alvermann & Eakle, 2003; Block & Duffy, 2008). Selection of authentic texts to complement strategy instruction may be challenging, as

may be reaching the necessary balance between teaching text content and the strategies needed to read it (Dole et al., 2009). The explicitness of strategy instruction is challenging both to learn and to implement, and it may be difficult to locate user-friendly instructional methods that are appropriate to diverse educational settings (Block & Duffy, 2008; Parr & Woloshyn, 2013). In university contexts, professors, as specialists in their disciplines, may not be aware of how they read or may not be experienced with presenting comprehension instruction, even if they are aware of strategies and are willing to embed them in their courses. Despite these instructional challenges, however, student-learning gains have provided evidence that comprehension instruction is warranted (Caverly et al., 2004; Falk-Ross, 2001).

Support for the instruction of strategic reading in university contexts has been documented (Simpson & Nist, 2000), and several researchers have reported positive outcomes of strategic reading instruction in specific sectors of the postsecondary population. One such sector includes developmental (or underprepared) readers, those who struggle with strategy selection, application, and self-regulation (Caverly et al., 2004). Falk-Ross (2001) taught students (a) to identify the purpose and focus of texts, (b) to identify and compare features of various genres as a prediction strategy, (c) to skim, analyze unfamiliar vocabulary, and (d) to construct summary statements during and after reading. Falk-Ross reported that after this strategy instruction, students' reading "became more focused, more critical, and more productive" (p. 283), evident in verbal and written contributions to the course as well as in pretests and posttests on reading achievement and comprehension.

Caverly et al. (2004) measured the short- and long-term effects of strategy instruction on weak developmental readers in university in terms of metacognition, cognition, and affect. Students were taught metacognitive, task, performance, self, and strategy awareness as well as how to utilize PLAN, a strategic reading mnemonic. After this instruction, students demonstrated significant pretest to posttest growth on comprehension and standardized reading tests. During follow-up interviews, these students also reported strategy transfer during the semester after instruction (Caverly et al., 2004). In a second study, Caverly et al. tracked developmental readers for 4 years, during which they learned to read strategically. Not only did the group who received reading instruction score higher on assessments than the control group, they also were able to apply the strategies they learned to a discipline-specific course (Caverly et al., 2004).

Strategy instruction for specific sectors of the university population has often been delivered in contexts removed from lectures, yet research on strategy instruction often includes recommendations for faculty involvement in discipline-specific courses. For example, Nel et al. (2004) argued that professors need to (a) understand their first-year students' reading needs and abilities so they can support students' attempts to cope with academic material, (b) use more learner-centred approaches in their teaching in order to encourage first-year students to become self-regulated, and (c) implement content-based strategy instruction in order to emphasize the need for flexible strategy use in various disciplines. Taraban et al. (2000) recommended that in order for university students to read successfully, they need to be encouraged to view strategy use as essential to their academic learning and they need to engage with challenging discipline-specific



tasks that incorporate the need for strategic reading. As the early years of university provide the foundation for independent and critical thinking, first- and second-year students in particular need to acquire discipline-specific skills that should be introduced by faculty: “the place to explain to students what is expected in a discipline is within that discipline” (Waters, 2003, p. 304). These recommendations support the need for faculty involvement with university students’ reading, particularly during the early stages when habits of study are being developed (Bailey, 2013).

In an overview of the literature, Chanock, Horton, Reedman, and Stephenson (2012) identified advantages of embedding strategy instruction in academic courses rather than isolating such instruction in standalone or remedial support formats. Students may perceive embedded strategy instruction as part of the overall university workload, rather than as an added task, and may appreciate its relevance easily because of its association with course texts. All students in a course may benefit from the strategy instruction, rather than only those who are singled out for remedial assistance. Finally, professors may benefit from embedding strategy instruction as they explain “the purposes of academic tasks [derived from their disciplines’] epistemology, and the forms, language, and conventions that flow from these various purposes” (Chanock et al., 2012, p. 2).

Although the literature on comprehension strategy instruction embedded in discipline-specific courses is not extensive at the postsecondary level, relevant studies have produced positive results that are encouraging for further research. In one of these studies, Shepherd et al. (2009) gauged first-year students’ abilities to read mathematics texts by evaluating performance of tasks described in the texts. These tasks were

foundational to more complex tasks that would need to be performed later in the course, yet students could not grasp or perform them well. Since all of the students had tested well in mathematics and reading, the authors attributed students' inability to understand and apply unfamiliar text content to poor comprehension of mathematics texts specifically. Drawing on Pressley and Afflerbach's (1995) metastudy of reading research, the authors formulated eight strategies important to reading mathematics texts that would address the gaps in their students' understanding. These strategies included previewing and prioritizing information; activating, integrating, and adjusting prior knowledge; inferring; determining meanings of unfamiliar words; monitoring comprehension and adjusting strategies as needed; evaluating, remembering, and reflecting on text; and anticipating how new knowledge might be used (Shepherd et al., 2009). By evaluating first-year students' comprehension needs and assigning evidence-based strategies to discipline-specific reading tasks, the authors established a firm foundation for further research in strategy instruction in mathematics.

Citing first-year students' difficulties reading their science texts, Smith et al. (2010) identified elaborative interrogation (a question-answering strategy) as the strategy most likely to encourage students to access prior knowledge in order to understand the dense content in science texts. The efficacy of elaborative interrogation was tested with approximately 300 students enrolled in a first-year biology course. One group was asked to reread challenging passages of authentic text while a second group was asked to read and respond to "why" questions posed after every 150 words of text. A significant improvement in comprehension was found in the group that elaborated on the text by asking and answering questions. These results provided evidence-based support for

further research in employing questioning strategies while reading science texts. The authors deemed the results of this study significant enough to encourage other science professors to consider providing instruction in elaborative interrogation, particularly important in a discipline in which extensive reading of challenging texts is considered essential to success (Smith et al., 2010).

### **Summary**

This section discussed cognitive, metacognitive, and affective components of reading comprehension strategy use associated with the academic self-regulation necessary for deep comprehension of texts. Students entering university may be expected to engage actively with broad and critical reading, often across several disciplines, yet many students may find such engagement challenging. Students transitioning to university may be surface learners facing significant cognitive demands in relation to academic reading and may require guidance as they acclimate to its rigors. In response to widespread perceptions of reading noncompliance and comprehension difficulties, professors may assist students with knowledge construction through discussions of metalearning and reading comprehension strategy instruction, practices that have been found effective in university environments. In this study, consideration of ways that professors can incorporate comprehension instruction within their discipline-specific courses requires discussion of their beliefs relevant to thinking about reading and its instruction. The following section provides context for such discussion.

### **Professors' Beliefs**

This study focused on the experiences and beliefs of professors of first- and second-year university students within the parameters of an educational development

initiative designed to promote students' reading comprehension. Providing instruction in comprehension strategies requires awareness on the part of professors of their own reading processes as well as a plan for communicating to students effective processes relevant to their disciplines (Holschuh & Aultman, 2009; Roberts & Roberts, 2008; Simpson & Nist, 2000). Accordingly, in this study, examining ways in which participants approached the challenge of integrating comprehension instruction within their courses included consideration of their thought processes relevant to their teaching practices. McAlpine, Weston, Timmermans, Berthiaume, and Fairbank-Roch's (2006) four zones of thinking provide context for examining professors' beliefs. Particularly relevant is the conceptual zone (encompassing abstract thinking about values and beliefs relevant to teaching and learning), as the "underpinning" informing the other three zones: strategic, tactical, and enactive (McAlpine, Weston, Timmermans, et al., 2006). Although professors may not be aware of all of their beliefs nor be able or willing to articulate them, the process of exploring beliefs opens doors to insights about professors' thinking (Fang, 1996; Hoy, Davis, & Pape, 2012; Leatham, 2006).

### **Teaching Roles**

As a backdrop for discussion of participants' beliefs relevant to reading and its instruction, consideration of institutional, cognitive, and personal factors that may be influential in professors' teaching roles may provide helpful context. As beliefs can be perceived as both emergent from and influential on life experience (Fives & Buehl, 2012; Jarvis, 2006), such contextualization seems important when considering professors' beliefs about their teaching and learning.

**Institutional factors.** Barnett (2012) wrote about the “supercomplexity” of today’s world in which universities are seen from multiple perspectives. On the one hand, universities can be viewed as “consumers of resources, or even as producers of resources,” while on the other hand, they can be viewed as “sites of open, critical and even transformatory engagement” (Barnett, 2012, p. 67). Both of these interpretations of the purpose of universities are operational in current thinking (Barnett, 2012). It has been argued that the most valuable purpose of the university is to safeguard and foster the development of human thought: “The university has many important ‘uses,’ but the source of its great strength lies not in its ability to generate commercial products, but in its capacity to appreciate the intrinsic value of intellectual discovery, human creativity, knowledge, and ideas” (Washburn, 2005, p. 240). This study is aligned with Washburn’s conception of the university’s intellectual role in society.

University professors’ roles are often described in terms of three distinct components: teaching, research, and service or administration. The relationship among these three components is becoming increasingly complex, particularly in the context of university policies that emphasize “wider access, performativity, efficiency, and control” (Kreber, 2010, p. 173). Professors may also perform tasks beyond these three components, including but not limited to writing letters of recommendation, counseling, and acting as disciplinary experts in public forums (O’Meara et al., 2008). The range of skills and knowledge that professors must possess as well as the number of hours required in order to carry out their duties are increasing (O’Meara et al., 2008).

Against a backdrop of “financial pressures, the increasing commodification of higher education and the insistent demands of the global marketplace” (Fitzgerald, 2014,

p. 207), university teaching practices have come under scrutiny in recent decades (Åkerlind, 2005; Devlin & Samarawickrema, 2010; MacDonald, 2001), at a time when respect for the professorial role in society has diminished (Fitzgerald, 2014). Defending professors' intellectual roles includes creative resistance to the characterization of professors as "academic managers" (Fitzgerald, 2014). Fitzmaurice (2010), for example, explored the need to view university teaching as a practice, rather than as a conduit for delivery of standardized methods and techniques. Relying on MacIntyre's (1985) vision of practice, Fitzmaurice described university professors as those who accept disciplinary standards of excellence and judge their own performance according to those standards within a framework of intentional justice, truthfulness, and courage. Teaching as practice was thus broadly defined as "creating and maintaining caring physical, cultural, intellectual, social and moral environments which induce learning" (Fitzmaurice, 2010, p. 48).

Concurrent with changes in perception of universities as cultural and social institutions and professors as intellectuals, there has also been reconsideration and debate around the definition and role of academic disciplines (Barnett, 2009; Becher & Trowler, 2001). Once seen as bastions of knowledge, and in some cases power and control, disciplinary boundaries have been challenged by current emphases on broader knowledge construction across societies and multiplicity of perspectives (Barnett, 2009). Harpham (2015) has argued that stances active within the current disciplinarity debate range from staunch separatism and associated elitism, what Trowler (2014) calls "strong essentialism," to interdisciplinarity and its associated focus on blending rather than maintaining distinctions across academic disciplines. For Harpham and others (e.g.,

Becher & Trowler, 2001; Donald, 2002; Kreber, 2009; Neumann, 2001; Trowler, 2014), disciplinarity remains a necessary and important way to define academic work, especially as various disciplines delineate multiple ways of understanding the world and constructing significant knowledge about it. This study is aligned with Harpham's (2015) vision of "a kind of coexistence between distinct but permeable forms of inquiry and explanation in which the disciplines maintain themselves and their distinctness, but stand ready to challenge and question the others, and to be questioned by them in turn" (pp. 236-237).

Traditionally, professors have been enculturated as undergraduates into a complex disciplinary system whereby they select an area of study and specialize in its methods of researching and disseminating knowledge. All aspects of their subsequent development and professional employment (research, teaching, and service) may be influenced by their disciplinary alignment and it is common for them to share this alignment with their students (Becher & Trowler, 2001; Donald, 2009). While professors can (and do) cross traditional disciplinary boundaries, and are influenced by factors other than disciplinary conventions, their initial enculturation typically remains strongly functional within their academic practices (Poole, 2009; Trowler, 2014). Discipline affects thinking, writing, and reading, and students as well as professors are likely to be influenced by disciplinary mores (Kreber, 2009; Marincovich & Prostko, 2005; Trowler, 2014). Kreber (2009) argued that introducing students to disciplinary mores may in fact be "empowering" to students, "in that it enhances their capacity to tackle new problems independently" (p. 24).

Poole (2009) described disciplines as “academic homes” (p. 50) in which professors find comfort and from which beliefs about ways of thinking and teaching emerge. Huber and Morreale (2002) also described academic disciplines in terms of their association with thinking about teaching, contextualizing each discipline’s pedagogies, journals, associations, and discourse within a “community of scholars” with “its own intellectual history, agreements, and disputes about subject matter and methods that influence what is taught, to whom, when, where, how, and why” (p. 2). Donald (2009) described disciplines in terms of the nature of thinking and concepts, the development of thinking processes, and the challenges of instruction, factors that influence ways that papers, articles, and other familiar forms of dialogue are developed (Poole, 2009). Given the depth and complexity of alignment with disciplinary mores, it is reasonable to expect that professors’ beliefs about learning and teaching may be strongly influenced by their disciplinary affiliations.

**Cognitive factors.** Having engaged in extensive disciplinary learning and having chosen academia as a career environment, professors presumably have become proficient in utilizing disciplinary ways of thinking. Although variation across the professorial population would be expected, it seems reasonable to characterize professors as higher order thinkers. Alexander et al. (2011) associated higher order thinking with both “intellectual activity and epistemic orientation,” characteristics that apply across all domains and tasks: “Higher order thinking is the mental engagement with ideas, objects, and situations in an analogical, elaborative, inductive, deductive, and otherwise transformational manner that is indicative of an orientation toward knowing as a complex, effortful, generative, evidence-seeking, and reflective enterprise” (p. 53). As



active thinkers, professors may expect students to learn to think similarly during their university studies, knowing that “higher education... requires learning of a higher cognitive order, including critical thinking and the application of knowledge to different contexts” (Wingate, 2007, p. 395).

Researchers have explored the complexities of higher order thinking relevant to teaching. For example, McAlpine, Weston, Timmermans, et al. (2006) described professors (within their teaching capacities) as problem solvers who define problem spaces and look actively for solutions. Within each problem space there is variation in which “certain goals and knowledge are foregrounded and others move to the background” (p. 602). Examination of the types of thinking in which professors engaged resulted in identification of four zones of thinking that inform teaching: conceptual, strategic, tactical, and enactive. The zones differ from “stages or levels on a scale” in that they have particular characteristics and uses but are also fluid, as professors move from one zone to another as they think about and enact their teaching (McAlpine, Weston, Timmermans, et al., 2006, p. 605). The conceptual zone encompasses abstract thinking about values relevant to teaching and learning. The strategic zone bridges from the conceptual to the tactical zone, as it encompasses both abstract and broad practical thinking about particular teaching activities. Within the tactical zone, thinking is specific as professors operationalize detailed teaching plans, and within the enactive zone, thinking is focused on instruction and interaction with students. Thinking within the conceptual zone “underpins the thinking across activity contexts” of the other zones and incorporates professors’ values and beliefs (McAlpine, Weston, Timmermans, et al., 2006, p. 610).

**Personal factors.** Although it is acknowledged that every member of the professoriate is unique, research has revealed general characteristics that are applicable to many professors. Citing Finkelstein's (1984) study, Lindholm (2004) reported that academics tend to be raised by families who "stress the value of intellectual pursuits and academic achievement" (p. 605). They tend to be "highly intelligent and show strong needs for achievement and autonomy" (Lindholm, 2004, p. 605). Not surprisingly, in United States surveys of faculty, the majority of academics cited "intellectual challenge," "autonomy," and "opportunities for intellectual freedom and pursuing personal interests" as important characteristics of their work (Lindholm, 2004, pp. 606-607). Despite recent significant structural and career changes in academia, "individuals [continue] to choose the academic life as an expression of their personal commitments to pursuits of knowledge" (O'Meara et al., 2008, p. 123). Jackson (2004) described professors as "proactive self-regulators for whom deliberate self-regulated learning is a way of life" (p. 391). O'Meara et al. (2008) emphasized the humanity and personal nature of the professorial role: "The truth behind faculty work is that it is personal, whether explicitly or implicitly so, in that it is the creation of personas – often individuals who devote their lives closely to what they do" (p. 175). It follows that in terms of teaching, professors who are committed to the pursuit of intellectual interests through self-regulated learning may model and discuss their learning processes with their students as they enact their teaching roles (Badger, 2008; Bain, 2004; Kane et al., 2002; Kreber, 2013).

### **Beliefs and Cognition**

This section discusses research on beliefs, associations between beliefs and knowledge, and influences on beliefs. Models for analyzing professors' beliefs,

specifically Leatham's (2006) sensible system framework and Prosser, Trigwell, and Taylor's (1994) inventory of teaching approaches, also are discussed.

**Conceptualizations and definitions.** A significant shift in education research prior to the 1980s redirected attention from the influence of teacher behaviour on student achievement toward cognitive processes associated with teacher behaviour (Fang, 1996). Teachers' thinking became an important element of understanding the complexities of teaching practice (Hoy et al., 2012), and research began to depict teachers as "professionals who make reasonable judgements and decisions within... complex and uncertain community, school and classroom environments" (Fang, 1996, p. 49). Teachers' beliefs were characterized as representative of extensive general knowledge that influences planning, decision making, and classroom actions, and thus beliefs assumed a position of importance (Fang, 1996). In a review of research on university professors' beliefs, Kane et al. (2002) drew on the literature from research on "primary, secondary, and pre-service teachers' beliefs" to identify points of consensus (p. 180). These included assertions that beliefs are often implicit and "difficult to articulate," but also may be "robust and resistant to change," as they act as filters for new knowledge, admitting or rejecting such knowledge depending on its consistency with existing beliefs (Kane et al., 2002, p. 180). In teaching contexts, beliefs filter information, frame educational tasks, and guide actions (Fives & Buehl, 2012; Hora, 2014).

Researchers have identified difficulties with terminology in the corpus of work on teacher beliefs in that many associated terms have been used synonymously with beliefs (e.g., representations, propositions, attitudes, understandings, ideologies, perspectives, commitments) and no standard definition has emerged (Kagan, 1992; Kane et al., 2002;

McAlpine, Weston, Berthiaume, & Fairbank-Roch, 2006). Some researchers believe that lack of consistency in the terminology around beliefs has caused confusion in the literature and weakened academic discussions (Kane et al., 2002). For the purposes of this study, the following descriptive statements about beliefs will be considered foundational. Beliefs are complex systems that develop through life experiences in varying contexts, influenced by multiple factors (Fives & Buehl, 2012; Pajares, 1992). Beliefs act as filters of perception and help to determine the relevancy of “information and experience” (Fives & Buehl, 2012, p. 478). Beliefs also act as frames to conceptualize problems or tasks and act as guides to motivate addressing problems or tasks (Fives & Buehl, 2012). Beliefs may be tacit or espoused; they may be held deeply and privately or articulated freely and clearly (Kane et al., 2002; Leatham, 2006). Beliefs are discussed here in the context of professors’ thinking (Kane et al., 2002; McAlpine, Weston, Berthiaume, et al., 2006); they are highly relevant to “orientations..., approaches, and intentions” (Kember, 1997, p. 256); and they are closely associated with conceptions of teaching (Kember, 1997), alternately called “‘values’..., ‘assumptions’, or theories” (McAlpine, Weston, Berthiaume, et al, 2006, p. 128).

**Beliefs and knowledge.** The relationship between beliefs and knowledge has been discussed extensively in the literature (e.g., Hoy et al., 2012; Murphy & Mason, 2012; Pajares, 1992). In a review, Murphy and Mason claimed that although many researchers in educational psychology have used the terms beliefs and knowledge “interchangeably,” distinctions have been made between knowledge, as “true and justified,” and beliefs, as not necessarily evidence-based (p. 3). Researchers have categorized knowledge as a subset of beliefs and beliefs as a subset of knowledge

(Murphy & Mason, 2012; Pajares, 1992). In their review of research on teachers' knowledge and beliefs, Hoy et al. (2012) followed "precedents set by other researchers" (p. 9) and treated the two constructs as "generally overlapping" (p. 10) Jarvis (2006) asserted that through learning, individuals develop ways of knowing, including "having knowledge and holding beliefs" (p. 3). Individuals learn beliefs cognitively as they gain knowledge, and although there is often greater commitment to beliefs than to knowledge, the two may seem similar in learners' minds (Jarvis, 2006).

Within the range of knowledge that teachers possess is craft knowledge, "the integrated set of knowledge, conceptions, beliefs and values teachers develop in the context of their teaching situation" (Van Driel, Verloop, Van Werven, & Dekkers, 1997, p. 107). Craft knowledge, "contextual, situated, and often tacit" (Hoy et al., 2012, p. 4), encompasses theoretical and scientific disciplinary knowledge and influences professors' responses to innovations in teaching (Van Driel et al., 1997).

**Influences on beliefs.** Although this study focused on exploration of professors' beliefs relevant to reading comprehension and its instruction, it is important to qualify that professors' beliefs are only one component of thinking about teaching, learning, and teaching actions as "understanding instructors' conceptions cannot fully explain the decisions and actions of teachers" (McAlpine, Weston, Berthiaume, et al., 2006, p. 128). As knowledge of various problems and tasks grows, so does the referential context upon which professors may draw as they develop skill in planning and enacting their teaching (McAlpine, Weston, Berthiaume, et al., 2006). Research on faculty growth has integrated concepts of individual agency, organizational influence, and sociocultural context in its acknowledgement of the "non-linearity and complexity of academic work" (Hora, 2014,

p. 39). University professors may be influenced by factors such as policies, faculty culture, academic discipline, and types of appointments that affect their work (Hora, 2014). Hora emphasized “the primacy of individual agency and the ability of educators to recognize situations and make decisions accordingly, in ways that are more or less constrained by the environment” (p. 39). In their model of teacher thinking, McAlpine, Weston, Berthiaume, et al. (2006) described interrelated processes of thinking, planning, and decision making that draw upon beliefs as they attend to contexts of “strategic goal setting and knowledge use” (p. 148). Thinking informs action, which then feeds reflection upon beliefs (McAlpine, Weston, Berthiaume, et al., 2006). Personal life experiences as well as schooling and formal (disciplinary and pedagogical) knowledge may influence beliefs about teaching (Hoy et al., 2012). Consideration of students in terms of their characteristics and goals, perceived needs, and feedback on instruction may also influence professors’ beliefs (Eley, 2006; Fives & Buehl, 2012; Stark, 2000).

**Leatham’s (2006) sensible system framework of beliefs.** As individuals may hold beliefs that vary depending upon circumstance, a framework for exploring professors’ beliefs in relationship to one another may be useful. Leatham’s (2006) sensible system framework, developed through research with mathematics instructors, posits that professors are sensible rather than inconsistent in terms of beliefs. From their perspectives, professors’ beliefs make sense within their own systems developed over time (Leatham, 2006). Considering the relationship among beliefs can provide a context within which individual beliefs may be explored. Leatham cites Thagard’s (2002) metaphor of belief systems as rafts where all pieces fit together and support one another, which thereby provides justification of individual, and perhaps contrasting, beliefs within

one system. As new beliefs are added to the “raft,” all existing beliefs are adjusted in order to reach “reflective equilibrium” (Thagard, 2002, p. 5). Although beliefs influence action, it should not be assumed that all professors articulate their beliefs completely or accurately, nor that researchers understand, infer, or interpret beliefs accurately (Leatham, 2006). When there are apparent inconsistencies among individuals’ beliefs, rather than assuming flaws in these professors’ perspectives, researchers should focus on understanding the beliefs more deeply and reconsider their own inferences (Leatham, 2006).

Beliefs may be explored in terms of their coherence in relationship with other beliefs: for example, the strength of a belief depends upon where it fits within individuals’ collective beliefs. Stronger beliefs may be considered more central and more resistant to change, while more arbitrary beliefs may be considered more peripheral in relation to other beliefs. Gauging the strength of a belief may not be something that individuals can articulate, so often the coherence of a belief must be “inferred from multiple data sources and contexts” (Leatham, 2006, p. 94). Beliefs may also be examined in terms of the “quasi-logical” relationships between them. It is more important that associations between primary and derivative beliefs make sense to the individuals involved than that they make sense to researchers (Leatham, 2006). Finally, beliefs may be examined in terms of isolation: individuals may separate some beliefs from others as exceptions (Leatham, 2006). Researchers may observe or infer inconsistencies in individuals’ beliefs, but the sensible system framework suggests that individuals have somehow justified exceptions within their “rafts”: they have adjusted other beliefs to accommodate the apparent variation in beliefs. While Leatham’s model does not provide

guidelines for formulating nuanced interpretations of individuals' beliefs, it does accommodate the complexity of belief systems and, indirectly, respect for the individuality and autonomy of professors.

**Prosser et al.'s (1994) inventory of teaching approaches.** One common approach to research on professors' beliefs focuses on analyzing conceptions (or intentions) relevant to approaches (or strategies) using a scale ranging from teacher-centred to student-centred orientations (e.g., Åkerlind, 2008; Allendoerfer, Wilson, Kim, & Burpee, 2014; Burroughs-Lange, 1996; Coffey & Gibbs, 2000; Entwistle & Walker, 2000; Kember & Kwan, 2000; Norton, Richardson, Hartley, Newstead, & Mayes, 2005; Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001, Trigwell, 2012). Prosser et al. (1994) developed an inventory to report results of their phenomenographic work on “university teachers’ approaches to teaching and the relationship between intention and strategy in teaching” (as cited in Trigwell & Prosser, 1996, p. 78). The study described five conceptions of learning (accumulating information, acquiring concepts to satisfy external or internal demands, conceptual development, and conceptual change) which were mapped on to four conceptions of teaching: transmitting information, helping students acquire concepts, helping students develop conceptions, and helping students change conceptions (Prosser et al., 1994). The conceptions of teaching were then categorized as teacher-focused, student-teacher interactive, and student-focused strategies (Trigwell & Prosser, 1996). Because of the perceived associations between conceptions of teaching and approaches to teaching, Trigwell and Prosser concluded that “improvements in teaching may be conceived of as requiring a conceptual change on the part of some teachers,” associated with a “sustained and systematic approach” to educational development “built upon



teachers examining and critically reflecting on their own practices and the outcomes of those practices” (p. 85).

Use of this model in the literature has often involved assumption of a hierarchy of approaches to teaching, with teacher-centred beliefs being considered less enlightened or effective than student-centred beliefs (Åkerlind, 2008; Kember, 1997). This evaluation has often been based upon complexity, with teacher-centred approaches, focused only on professors’ activity, being considered less complex, and, therefore, less comprehensive than student-centred approaches which are focused on both the professors’ activity and the students’ learning experiences (Åkerlind, 2008). An assumption also seems implicit that when professors’ approaches to teaching fail to meet specific criteria (i.e., student-centred), a need for improvement is indicated. Åkerlind (2008) attributed these assumptions to the nature of phenomenography, in which conceptions represent “different breadths of awareness” of teaching, “constituted as an experiential relationship between the teacher and the phenomenon” (p. 634). Through educational (and conceptual) development, professors’ breadths of awareness may be expanded from focusing merely on teaching activity toward broader, more student-centred beliefs that will in turn improve teaching (Åkerlind, 2008).

Devlin (2006) explored the relationship between professors’ conceptions of university teaching and their teaching contexts, and provided an important perspective on labelling teaching as student-centered or teacher-centered. Citing the frequency of this assertion associating beliefs with outcomes in educational development programming, Devlin emphasized the lack of empirical evidence for such links and suggested that further research is needed before claims of direct association can be made. Recent studies

have also claimed that changes in professors' conceptions must precede improvements in university teaching (Devlin, 2006). Again, Devlin pointed out the lack of empirical evidence for this unidirectional association between conceptions and teaching improvements. This study heeds Devlin's warnings about the assertion that conceptions of teaching are directly linked to teaching behaviours and subsequently to students' learning. Although the intention of the current study was to explore professors' beliefs as associated with their thinking about teaching as fully as possible, it was beyond the scope of this study to connect those beliefs directly with professors' teaching behaviours or students' learning. It was also beyond the scope of this study to suggest that professors needed to improve their teaching or that exploring their beliefs would lead to such improvements. Although "examining and critically reflecting" (Trigwell & Prosser, 1996, p. 85) on practice and its outcomes was encouraged throughout the educational development initiative, the overall intention was to explore beliefs as a significant contributor to professors' individual thinking and teaching practices, where each practice was considered as valuable as the other (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Devlin, 2006). In this way, there is no one definition of good teaching, as good teaching is dependent upon context, discipline, and culture (Collins & Pratt, 2011; Devlin, 2006; Hubball, Collins, & Pratt, 2005). Accordingly, this study positions teaching as "a personal activity that is socially mediated, culturally authorized, and historically situated" and therefore asserts that a variety of teaching approaches is required in order to meet student needs in ways consistent with professors' teaching practices (Collins & Pratt, 2011, p. 360). Working within this definition of teaching includes acknowledgement of the existence and potential influence of my own teaching beliefs as the facilitator of this study.

### **Learning within Educational Development Contexts**

Beliefs may be considered as a component of professors' ongoing learning relevant to their teaching. In a constructivist view of cognition and learning, a variety of social and cultural factors, including both beliefs and knowledge, influences individual learning (Devlin, 2006). Jarvis (2006) positioned beliefs as an element of human biography that also includes knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, "or the senses – or any combination of them" (p. 1). If learning is the transformative outcome of individuals' experiences that changes their biographies, beliefs (integrated with knowledge, values, and attitudes) may affect and be affected by learning (Jarvis, 2006).

### **Background and Definitions**

One of the ways that professors have been encouraged to continue their learning about teaching is through educational development programming (also referred to as faculty development, instructional development, curriculum development, professional development, organizational development, and academic development; Taylor & Colet, 2010). The term educational development is used widely in Canada and encompasses all efforts focused on the "development of learning and teaching capacity" (Taylor & Colet, 2010, p. 143). Such educational development has been rationalized in part by the shifts in recent decades associated with globalization and associated educational goals. Such rationalization includes the belief that in a world of changing higher education "reshaped by scientific and technological innovations, global interdependence, cross-cultural contacts, and changes in economic and political power balances" (Groccia, 2010, p. 2), professors may benefit from developing "effective educational practices that engage students across disciplinary boundaries in active learning that tackles real problems and

leads to sustained intellectual growth, results that can be applied realistically, and a heightened sense of personal responsibility” (Groccia, 2010, p. 3).

More relevant to this study, Amundsen and Wilson (2012) defined educational development in terms of “actions, planned and undertaken by faculty members themselves or by others working with faculty, aimed at enhancing teaching” (p. 90). In a conceptual review of educational development initiatives, Amundsen and Wilson identified six clusters of recent initiatives, characterized by their foci (skill, method, institution, reflection, discipline, and action research or inquiry). The six clusters were analyzed in terms of common characteristics and categorized as emphasizing outcome or process. Initiatives emphasizing outcome (skill, method, institution) focused on achieving a predetermined objective and were assessed in terms of successful completion of the objective. Initiatives emphasizing process (reflection, discipline, action research, or inquiry) focused on “learning that may result in different outcomes for different faculty or multiple outcomes for an individual faculty member” (Amundsen & Wilson, 2012, p. 108). Process initiatives usually focused on “individual meaning making” and supported “a questioning orientation to teaching and learning” with the expectation that engagement in such initiatives might lead to changed thinking and improved teaching (p. 108).

This study included implementation of a process-oriented educational development initiative intended to explore participants’ craft knowledge and to capitalize upon the participants’ independence and agency in the context of learning and growth. In an extensive review and synthesis of the literature on American higher education faculty, O’Meara et al. (2008) proposed a narrative “to advance research-based understanding of faculty growth” (p. 165). In such a narrative, professors are viewed as agents who are

“central players in the design of the developmental supports they themselves require to grow as individuals, scholars, teachers, and members of multiple communities” (O’Meara et al., 2008, p. 165). Learning is central to this work as professors are engaged in deliberate, ongoing learning and sharing of their research on teaching in addition to their work in their disciplinary areas (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; O’Meara et al., 2008).

### **Effective Educational Development**

The importance of faculty-focused learning initiatives has been underscored by researchers such as Dee and Daly (2009), who characterized university faculty roles as complex and found that professors need support from those who acknowledge their expertise and abilities to address issues in their teaching while providing information and help with navigation of unfamiliar territory. Several components of effective educational development have been identified in the literature. For example, some faculty may be isolated in their disciplines, their departments, or their daily practices, and may benefit from the collaborative thinking that can occur in ongoing discussions about their teaching (Eddy & Mitchell, 2011). Kitchen, Parker, and Gallagher (2008) cited benefits of authentic conversations about teaching that are voluntary, rich in content, inclusive of differences of opinion, and gain the momentum needed to continue over time. Providing knowledge relevant to professors’ expressed needs associated with their teaching may be effective, as may remembering that shifting instructional practice takes time; the momentum of a semester and course content may take priority over implementation of new instruction, thus slowing implementation (Kise, 2006). Consideration may also be given to professors’ contextual history, in other words the ways that their beliefs have developed over time. Smyth (2003) argued that consideration of professors’ fundamental

beliefs is critical to the deep learning and growth desirable as a result of participation in educational development.

## **Reflection**

Educational development that focuses on faculty members' needs for "growth, achievement, and collegial connection" (Dee & Daly, 2009, p. 2) may provide opportunities for faculty to reflect on their work, to identify areas of strength, and to initiate learning about new initiatives that they believe will help to improve their teaching practices (Dee & Daly, 2009). Reflection has been defined as "thoughtful consideration and questioning of what we do, what works and what doesn't, and what premises and rationales underlie our teaching and that of others" (Hubball et al., 2005, p. 60).

Reflection may bring about change in frames of reference (conceptions) or it may confirm or validate conceptions (or assumptions; Kreber, 2006). Content, process, and premise reflection (Mezirow, 1991) involve testing the validity of assumptions within the context in which we work in order to gain "valuable forms of knowing" (Kreber, 2006, p. 91). Content reflection involves identifying a problem and calling on current knowledge to identify a usual solution. Content reflection provides a first step of identifying beliefs, critical to further reflection. Process reflection questions how and why something works and is often informed by educational literature and teaching experience. Premise reflection looks at individuals' assumptions and how they came to believe them (Kreber, 2006). Content, process, and premise reflection have been considered as levels of reflective activity in which one type of reflection is not considered sufficient on its own (Kreber, 2006), but in this study the three types of reflection have been considered equally beneficial and interrelated, depending upon circumstance.

Proponents of incorporating reflection in educational development initiatives cite benefits relevant to increased depth of knowledge and experience as well as personal awareness. For example, McAlpine, Weston, Timmermans, et al. (2006) found that “reflection can lead to a richer understanding of teaching within a particular context” (p. 611). Reflection may also be cumulative and “increase the breadth, depth and complexity of knowledge in relation to action” (McAlpine, Weston, Timmermans, et al., 2006, p. 611). Andrews, Garrison, and Magnussen (1996) found that “excellent teachers use self-reflection to develop a model (either formal or informal) for teaching within a particular context; they then attempt to ‘live the model,’ and be authentic to and congruent with their model” (pp. 86-87). Clegg (2002), however, warned against imposing formal processes of reflection on professors as they may not be accustomed to verbalizing or sharing their personal thoughts, nor may they be open to reflecting in structured situations. Accordingly, respect for professors and flexibility in design and use of reflection in educational development initiatives are important (Clegg, 2002).

### **Effective Educational Developers**

Researchers of the FACDEV Mobility Project (Saroyan & Frenay, 2010) developed an internationally relevant conceptual framework for educational development practice. Within this framework, educational developers were characterized as requiring expertise that incorporates abilities (a) to understand academic culture as well as teaching and learning, (b) to participate in effective communication, (c) to facilitate leadership, and (d) to aide in developing others’ expertise. Core values and principles of educational developers included offering evidence-based practice in local contexts focused on learning and collegiality, and prioritizing ethical qualities such as critical examination,

respect, and confidentiality (Bédard, Clement, & Taylor, 2010). In this study, an attempt was made to adhere to these principles throughout processes of design, facilitation, reflection, and analysis of participants' experiences.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided theoretical contexts for the study, specifically four theories of learning relevant to knowledge building, reading comprehension, personal growth, and professors' professional growth. Following a description of reading strategy use relevant to deep comprehension of text, it was argued that students in the early years of university may benefit from assistance with strategy use ideally through professors providing reading comprehension instruction in discipline-specific courses. Consideration of such instruction incorporated professors' beliefs, discussed here in context of cognition and teaching roles, thus emphasizing the importance of beliefs to thinking about academic reading and comprehension instructional planning. Finally, professors' beliefs were associated with learning and discussed in context of best practices for educational development. The educational development initiative for this study, intentionally incorporating such best practices, is described in Chapter Three.



### **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

In this chapter, the design of the study is outlined through descriptions of its theoretical underpinnings and methodological framework. The methodology is outlined through descriptions of the site, participants, and the educational development initiative, as well as methods and phases of data collection and analysis. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of ethical considerations and methodological assumptions and limitations.

#### **Research Design**

The collection and interpretation of qualitative research data can be associated with a study's initial design (Peshkin, 2000). The selection of core theoretical positions and methodology inherently precludes selection of others, or at least subjugates others to subordinate positions. While committing to particular theories and methodologies, however, researchers are advised to move toward balance when employing them, between exploring meaning and imposing meaning upon phenomena (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2013).

The challenge to qualitative researchers is, therefore, to go beyond what presents itself, to reveal dimensions of a phenomenon which are concealed or hidden, whilst at the same time taking care not to impose meaning upon the phenomenon, not to squeeze it into pre-conceived categories or theoretical formulations, not to reduce it to an underlying cause. (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2013, p. 9)

Meeting such a challenge necessitates ethical conduct throughout a study (Pearson, Albon, & Hubball, 2015; Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2013) as well as careful selection of theoretical underpinnings and methodology.

## **Theoretical Underpinnings**

The design of this study was informed by concepts of psychological constructivism. The intent was for the participants and me, positioned as learners, to co-create knowledge about beliefs associated with instructional planning and implementation while exploring learning that occurred as a result of individual and social experiences with an educational development initiative (Gordon, 2008; Prawat & Floden, 1994; Taylor & Colet, 2010; Yilmaz, 2008). Principles drawn from Saroyan and Frenay's (2010) international model of educational development influenced the scope of my role, specifically in the decisions (a) to invite colleagues to participate in the study, thus "working in the local context"; (b) to act as a resource for literature relevant to reading comprehension and education, therefore "using evidence-based knowledge"; (c) to facilitate multiple conversations about participants' experiences and beliefs while "maintaining a focus on learning"; and (d) to emphasize equitable dialogue, thus "respecting collegiality" (Taylor & Colet, 2010, p. 147). Jarvis's (2006) theory of human learning positions learning as part of an ongoing, life-changing interaction with the world and incorporates beliefs as a significant contributor to transformative experience. The goals for learning during the study reflected the broad scope of this theory in that holistic, realistic, and practical learning, experienced by professors and expressed through their beliefs, was a desired outcome (Jarvis, 2006).

## **Methodological Framework**

As the purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of university professors as they participated in an educational development initiative, qualitative research methods seemed most fitting. Specifically, as it was intended that the study

would emphasize the “socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 10), the educational development initiative was aligned with principles of qualitative research. The study employed “empirical materials – case study, personal experience, introspection, life story, interview... and visual texts” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 6) to aid in description of individuals’ lived experience; the space in which “individual belief and action intersect with culture” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 4). Through the use of various interpretive practices, it was intended that the study would provide multifaceted, multivoiced interpretations of participants’ experiences as they integrated comprehension instruction within their discipline-specific courses (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

The selection of case study as a specific method for this qualitative research was based upon several characteristics that seemed compatible with the purpose of the research. Case study provides the opportunity to develop a “nuanced view of reality” and can produce the “concrete, context-dependent knowledge” particular to social science research (Flyvbjerg, 2011, pp. 5-6). As the goals for this research included understanding participants’ beliefs about the nature of reading comprehension and its instruction, as well as ways that participants plan and enact comprehension instruction throughout an educational development initiative, case study provided the framework within which such in-depth exploration could occur. A group of professors who taught first- and second-year students in a small university and were interested in addressing students’ reading comprehension through their instruction comprised the “bounded system” used for description and analysis in this study (Merriam, 2009). The intention to explore the

meanings they assigned to the experience through asking how and why questions (Yin, 2009) signalled that case study would be an appropriate framework for this inquiry.

Within such a constructivist framework, I played an active role in each phase of the initiative, simultaneously facilitating and contributing to discussions. Decisions were often influenced by the ongoing evolution of the study. For example, the content of the data collection phases relied on the emergent research so that the substance of each step informed the substance of the following steps (Creswell, 2012). The study was constructed using multiple methods and reasoning incorporating both inductive and deductive logic (Creswell, 2013). Ultimately, the study sought to create a holistic account (Merriam, 2009) and a complex pattern of meaning (Creswell, 2013) that would elucidate the experiences of professors as they participated in an educational development initiative focused on their espoused beliefs and enactment of reading comprehension instruction.

### **Methodology**

Drawing on theories of psychological constructivism, the methodology for this study was developed with the intention to explore participants' experiences utilizing individual interviews as well as group sessions, and to encourage reflection associated with individual cognition as well as socially constructed learning. In accordance with best practices in qualitative research, interviews and pre-instructional dialogues were viewed as opportunities for discussion with participants, rather than as catalysts for gaining responses to pre-determined questions (Yin, 2009). As such, although a protocol of semistructured questions was developed for the interviews (see Appendices A, B, and C), there was an attempt to reach a balance between seeking answers to the questions and exploring the participants' ideas and webs of thought (Yin, 2009). Interviews and pre-

instructional dialogues were seen as spaces for “negotiated accomplishment” in which the participants and I shared opportunities for deconstruction and clarification (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 717). The use of group data collection phases, including an information session and focus groups, provided an opportunity for participants to discuss their beliefs about the preparedness of first- and second-year students (specifically their reading comprehension), their beliefs and practices associated with teaching, and their beliefs about implementing reading comprehension instruction. Incorporating the “praxis disposition” of working “*with* people and not *on* them [original emphasis]” (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2011, p. 21), the group sessions were designed as checkpoints during the educational development initiative in which participants and I compared notes on their thinking, processes which supported the decentralization of the researcher and foregrounded “the power of dialogue” (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2011, p. 25).

### **Site and Participants**

The study involved participants teaching in a small university (approximately 1,000 full- and part-time students) operational on a community college campus in accordance with a partnership agreement between the two institutions. While an instructional center on campus had been developed to support instructors in college programs, and while some university professors utilized its services, there was no specific programming offered relevant to university-level instruction including supporting students’ reading and writing. Writing support for university students was offered through the college writing centre, but no consistent support for reading had been established.

In accordance with the operationalization of the partnership agreement at the time of the study, the college employed faculty to deliver first- and second-year courses in the university degree program, and the university employed faculty to deliver some second- and all upper-year courses. The university vetted all faculty curriculum vitae, and faculty members, regardless of their employing institution, developed courses autonomously. At the time of the study, university and college faculty had shared over 10 years of experience developing university instruction and working collegially within the partnership.

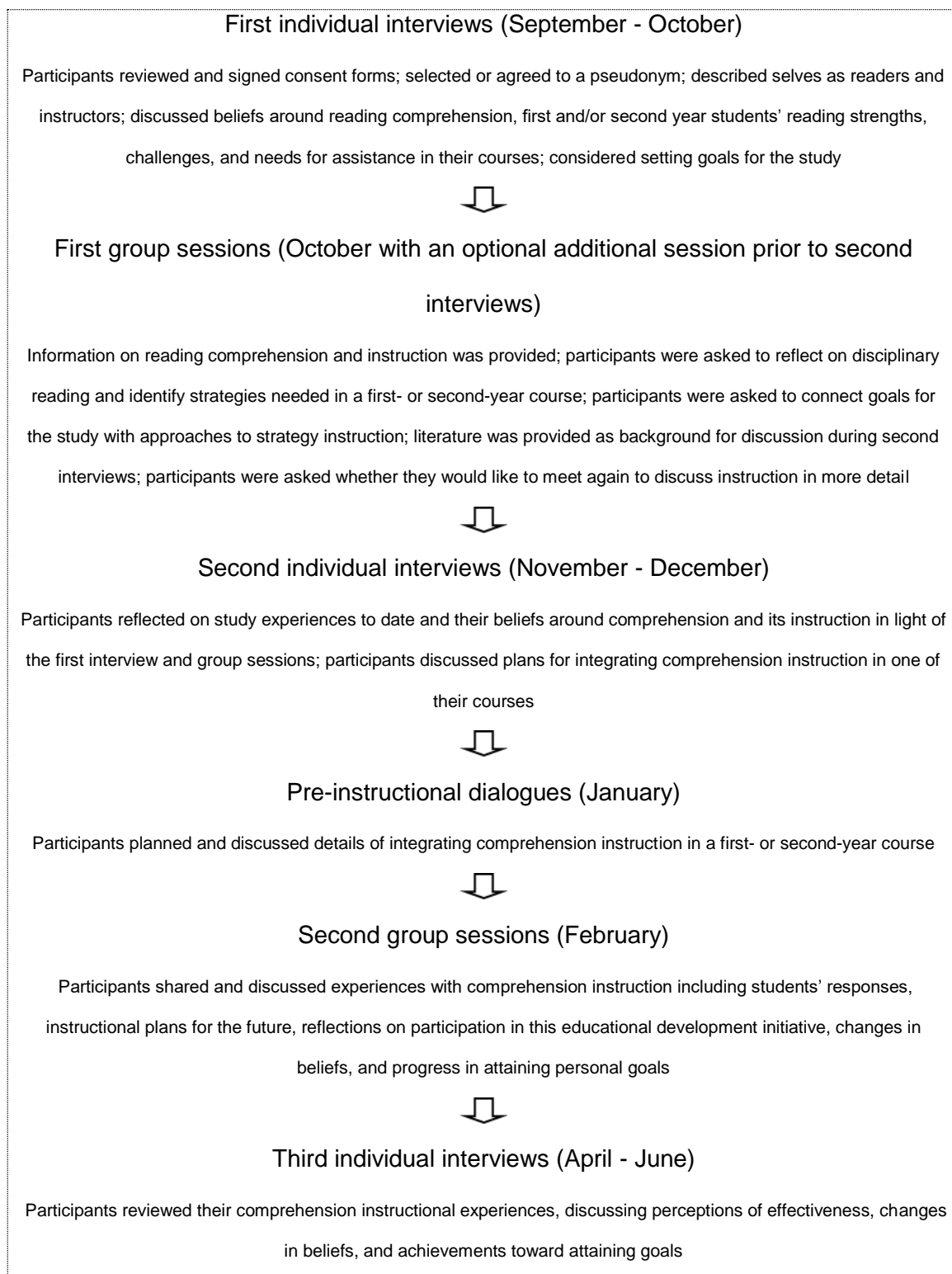
All full-time and sessional faculty teaching first- and second-year courses in the university across the fall and winter terms were invited to participate in the educational development initiative, subject to their availability. That is, professors who expected to be available in both the fall and winter semesters were invited to participate in the study beginning in early September and concluding the following April. Participation in the study assumed willingness to incorporate reading comprehension instruction and the belief that such instruction could be valuable in a disciplinary course.

A letter of invitation outlining the nature of the study and the scope of involvement was sent to 38 professors through email and delivered in print to their mailboxes on campus. As professors responded through email, by phone, or in person, questions about the study were answered and an initial interview was scheduled. Five professors with postsecondary teaching experience ranging from 9 years to over 30 years committed to participating in the educational development initiative. The response rate of 13% was considered sufficient, in part, due to the small number of professors at the university eligible to participate and the desire to gain depth of understanding consistent

with other case studies (Creswell, 2013). As it was intended that the study provide an in-depth, “nuanced view of reality” typical of qualitative research (Flyvbjerg, 2011, pp. 5-6), the sample size allowed for retention of “the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” that could contribute to an understanding of “complex social phenomena” (Yin, 2009, p. 4). Two participants were sessional professors and the remaining three were full-time or tenured professors. Two were male and three were female. Two professors taught in English studies, one in social work, one in history, and one in anthropology. Three participants selected first-year courses and the remaining two participants selected second-year courses as their foci for the study. Two of the courses were electives and two were required for majors, while one course could be completed as either an elective or major requirement.

### **The Educational Development Initiative**

This study aligned with Amundsen and Wilson’s (2012) assertion that educational development initiatives should be designed with cognisance of “the situated and social nature of teaching” (p. 111) rather than as isolated events targeting particular goals and outcomes. Accordingly, the study progressed through several phases over 1 academic year (see Figure 1). A first individual interview (September/October), the first group session (October), and a second individual interview (November/December) were completed prior to the end of first semester to minimize conflict with final grading and exams and to allow sufficient time to plan the implementation of comprehension instruction during the second semester. Ongoing opportunities for dialogue were offered throughout the first semester and during the period between semesters. An individual pre-



*Figure 1.* Timeframe for the educational development initiative.



instructional dialogue (January), the second group session (February), and a third individual interview (April – June) provided opportunities for participants to finalize, implement, and reflect on their instruction.

**First individual interview.** The purpose of the first interview was to gather foundational information for the study in terms of participants' backgrounds, instructional practices, and perceptions of reading comprehension. The first interviews were scheduled in September and October and were approximately 1 hour long. As the interview began, participants were asked to review and sign a consent form (Creswell, 2013), were given a timeframe diagram similar to Figure 1, and were asked if they would like to select a pseudonym. Participants who did not select a pseudonym themselves were assigned one and informed of the pseudonym by which they would be referred to in text. Semistructured questions were asked (Merriam, 2009) about participants' beliefs and goals for the study. Prior to the interview, participants were sent the protocol questions for their consideration (Creswell, 2012).

In order to gain a sense of professional context, the initial questions asked participants to describe themselves as academics in their disciplines (Philipsen, 2010; Simmons, 2011), and as teachers of first- and second-year students. Beliefs were defined as opinions or assumptions that have emerged from experiences to inform knowledge and values (Smyth, 2003). Participants then were asked to reflect on their own beliefs about reading (evidenced in practices as professors and as former students) and to articulate their perceptions of reading comprehension in their disciplines. Participants then were asked about their practices related to course-specific assigned readings, expectations for completion, and perceptions of students' reading comprehension abilities. Participants

were asked about how they viewed students' reading strengths and challenges, as well as the types of assistance that students might require. These questions were intended to encourage participants to reflect on ways in which their own reading experiences appeared to be similar to and different from their students' and to consider ways in which students' comprehension might be supported. Finally, participants were asked to set individual goals for their participation in the study in order to encourage engagement and reflection, as well as to provide a measure by which participation might be assessed subsequently (McAlpine & Weston, 2000). This series of questions reflected the constructivist nature of the study in its focus on context: participants were encouraged to reflect on their prior experiences and to draw on their beliefs in order to articulate their craft knowledge and thereby establish a foundation for subsequent reflection and learning. Consistent with the emergent and organic nature of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), the data collected in the first interviews informed the design of the first group session.

**First group session.** The purpose of the first group session was threefold: (a) to provide participants with information on reading comprehension instruction, (b) to provide an opportunity for participants to share beliefs about reading comprehension, and (c) to generate ideas for comprehension instruction that would be explored throughout the study. While the original intention was for participants to meet simultaneously, two small group sessions needed to be arranged (October) as participants' schedules and time constraints did not allow for a common meeting time. Participants selected group times according to their schedules and, in general, two to three participants attended different

sessions, with numbers varying according to availability. Both sessions were approximately 90 minutes long.

Prior to the sessions, participants were sent the following question to consider in preparation for discussion: After thinking about your own approaches to reading in your discipline, which approaches and strategies would you like your first- or second-year students to learn? The question was intended to encourage participants to bring their perceptions of effective disciplinary reading forward to the group session for consideration in light of the literature on comprehension and reading instruction. Because comprehension in each discipline requires particular strategies employed in particular ways (Donald, 2002), the intention was for participants, as disciplinary experts, to recall the development of their reading practices as discussed during the individual interviews. As they integrated information on evidence-based strategies with their own reading experiences, participants were encouraged to identify comprehension strategies that students require in the context of their disciplines (Smith et al., 2010).

The introduction to this session included welcoming the participants and reminding them of procedural details such as the importance of maintaining confidentiality of the session contents and attempting to avoid overlaps in speech for the benefit of the transcriptionist. The purpose of the session was described and a package of printed material was given to participants including an outline of the information provided with space for notes, copies of three articles relevant to reading comprehension at the postsecondary level (Alexander, 2005; Holschuh & Aultman, 2009; Parr & Woloshyn, 2013), and a list of sources used during the presentation. The information provided was not intended to comprise a comprehensive review of reading instruction,

but rather to outline elements of effective comprehension including the use of evidence-based strategies and principles of instruction that could be adapted for integration in and across discipline-specific courses. The original intention was to offer an additional group session (prior to the second interviews) on reading instruction in order to discuss instructional principles in more detail.

As part of the first session, definitions of reading comprehension were provided (Calfee, 2009; Cartwright, 2009; Fox, Dinsmore, Maggioni, & Alexander, 2009; Pearson, 2009), with the general agreement that comprehension involves readers internally and actively processing text, a process that is visible by others only through observation or readers' expressions of understanding. The definitions were contextualized in terms of first- and second-year students' common practices and attitudes toward academic reading (Fox, Alexander, & Dinsmore, 2007; Mann, 2000; Paulson & Armstrong, 2011) including possible passivity and resistance. Next, some of the challenges students may face relevant to academic reading were described (Donald, 2002; Freebody & Freiberg, 2011; Halpern, 1998; Mulcahy-Ernt & Caverly, 2009; Pawan & Honeyford, 2009), including limited experience with the volume, variety, and importance of reading for university study. The challenges discussed in the literature were then associated with similar challenges previously expressed by participants in their first interviews.

Articles shared with participants were selected on the basis of their currency, relevance to postsecondary applications, authorship by scholars well known in their fields, and breadth of coverage (e.g., literature reviews). Particularly during early stages of the study, the intention was to select articles that complemented participants' existing disciplinary and instructional interests, rather than those that might directly challenge

their beliefs. The decision to use such criteria for article selection may be perceived as supporting the participants' status quo, rather than encouraging them to examine their beliefs. However, given the exploratory nature of the study (beginning with the status quo), and my role as invested colleague and facilitator (rather than instructor or evaluator), it seemed most appropriate to support participants' instructional planning through selection of materials relevant to their interests.

To contextualize reading processes and comprehension as contributory to lifelong learning and development, Alexander's (2005) lifespan developmental perspective on reading was described. This model positions comprehension as critical to survival and enjoyment in a world dependent upon written language. Alexander also argues that comprehension development is situation-specific as well as stage-specific. Therefore, students entering the early years of university may be in the acclimation stage of academic reading and may require support and instruction in reading comprehension strategies. Participants were encouraged to read the article to gain background information for developing their own comprehension instruction.

The second article summarized literature addressing reading comprehension instruction within discipline-specific courses. Holschuh and Aultman (2009) emphasize the need for university students to develop comprehension strategies incorporating metacognitive, cognitive, and affective elements, and the article provides approaches to strategy instruction. These include direct instruction and cognitive apprenticeship, both of which include the final goal of students transitioning from instruction to independent strategy generation and utilization. Participants were encouraged to read this article in order to consider their own approaches to comprehension instruction.

Finally, in an attempt to suggest specific evidence-based strategies that might be useful to participants as they planned their comprehension instruction, Parr and Woloshyn's (2013) article was discussed. This article describes a self-study in which a series of comprehension strategies was presented to first-year students. The strategies were taught cumulatively and included monitoring for meaning, considering text structure, questioning, drawing inferences, paraphrasing, summarizing, and synthesizing ideas. Providing this particular article on strategy instruction, rather than another, presented a risk of introducing bias through establishing myself as an expert whose work I expected participants to employ in their own instructional planning. To counteract this perception, I presented the article as one option and situated it as a starting point for discussion. I decided to use the article, in part, because it provided description of comprehension instruction implemented within the same university in which participants were employed, thus potentially increasing its relevance.

Following this introduction to literature on reading comprehension and reading instruction, a verbal summary of key points was provided, and the session was opened for discussion. Participants were encouraged to discuss their thoughts related to the question that had been sent to them prior to the session (also printed on their handout) or to raise any points they wished to pursue following the introduction.

Participants in both groups shared their approaches to teaching first- and second-year students, including ways that reading and writing assignments were introduced and evaluated. As an invested facilitator, I participated in the conversation by asking questions about reading intended to clarify or refocus the discussion. Topics of discussion in both groups included (a) motivation for reading, (b) students' responsibility for reading

and professors' responsibility for addressing reading during classes, (c) students' contexts for reading such as their prior experiences with digital technologies, and (d) participants' perceptions of students' challenges relevant to comprehension and writing as compared to students' perceptions of their challenges. Participants in both groups asked for clarification or contextualization of terminology such as cognitive apprenticeship.

At the end of the first group sessions, I offered to send participants further articles relevant to their expressed interests, with all participants responding favourably.

Although an additional group session was offered, because of prior commitments and the weight of their workloads, participants opted not to meet again during the first semester. The articles, therefore, became the primary additional source of information on reading instruction and provided an alternate method of delivering information that was consistent with participants' preferences. After the initial distribution of interest-specific articles, all articles were sent to all participants in an attempt to establish a compendium of literature available for reference (see Appendix D).

**Second individual interview.** The purpose of the second individual interview was twofold: to ask participants to reflect on their experiences in the first interview and the group session, and to discuss participants' initial ideas for comprehension instruction in their courses. The second interviews were scheduled in November and December and were approximately 1 hour long. Semistructured questions were designed to draw on content from prior discussions and to explore connections between participants' expressed beliefs and early stages of their instructional planning. As with the first interview, participants were sent the protocol questions prior to the interview for their consideration.

The interview began with a request for clarification of points from the first interview and an opportunity for participants to elaborate on prior statements. In order to encourage reflection on the group session, a verbal summary of the participants' descriptions of themselves as professors was provided (drawn from the first interview) and they were asked about perceived similarities or differences between their approaches and their colleagues' approaches. Feedback was requested on the articles provided during the group session and afterwards, and discussion of salient points from the literature was encouraged. These discussions provided a sense of the participants' engagement with the literature at that point in the study, a consideration which was associated with a question about participants' awareness of any changes in their thinking about reading, or their beliefs about teaching first- or second-year students, since the beginning of the study.

As a prelude to discussion of participants' instructional ideas, a review of ways in which participants had addressed reading comprehension previously in their courses was provided. This verbal review was drawn from statements made during the first interview and the group sessions and was intended to serve as a foundation for discussion of comprehension instruction. Participants were asked to comment on the review and then to identify an area of comprehension to address in their courses. Discussion of instructional approaches, integration of approaches with existing course content, and foreseeable challenges was encouraged. As well, support for instructional planning before the second semester (when instruction would be implemented) was offered, and next steps in planning were discussed. No participants engaged in additional discussion of their instructional plans during the winter break.



**Pre-instructional dialogue.** The purpose of the pre-instructional dialogues was to discuss in detail participants' plans for integrating comprehension instruction in their courses during the winter semester. Individual dialogues took place in January and were approximately 1 hour long. As instructional content was discussed, details of participants' approaches to comprehension instruction and follow-up with students were finalized. Discussions included topics such as (a) appropriate scope and length of class instruction, (b) integration of instruction with existing course material, (c) indications of students' increased comprehension, (d) sequencing of instructional segments, and (e) the importance of contextualization of comprehension strategies for students' overall success in university.

Grierson and Woloshyn (2013) discussed the importance of differentiated coaching for elementary teachers involved with professional development initiatives and associated such differentiation with evidence-based teaching strategies employed to enhance the learning of diverse student populations. It seemed reasonable that differentiated coaching for professors involved in educational development would also be appropriate, particularly as participants were not following a standardized curriculum and, therefore, planned to enact comprehension instruction in a variety of ways. As participants' instructional plans were unique, no interview protocol was used for this dialogue. Instead, an attempt was made to ask questions that would assist participants in clarifying their instructional rationales and procedures in ways consistent with the literature addressing comprehension instruction.

**Second group session.** The purpose of the second group session was to provide an opportunity for participants to discuss their comprehension instruction with one

another in the hope that a group discussion would provide an opportunity to share beliefs and practices and to learn from colleagues' experiences. Specifically, the intention was that sharing experiences from individual instruction and responding to concerns collectively would enrich construction of knowledge about comprehension instruction and inform further reflection (McAlpine & Weston, 2000). As with the first group session, the original intention was for all participants to meet simultaneously but again, schedules and time constraints made it necessary to schedule two separate group sessions (February), where numbers varied between two and three, according to participants' availability. Both sessions were approximately 90 minutes long.

At the beginning of the sessions, participants were asked to describe their comprehension instruction, to comment on processes of implementation, and to share perceptions of instructional effectiveness to date. As participants responded to one another's narratives, topics of discussion included a) challenges of seamless integration of comprehension instruction, b) students' perceptions of the importance of academic reading, c) incentives for students to complete assigned work, d) reasonable student workload, and e) pacing and scaffolding of instruction. Participants also discussed barriers to engagement with comprehension instruction including decreased numbers of full-time faculty (who were perceived as having more time and motivation to learn and implement new approaches) as well as possible extensions of the study (e.g., an interdisciplinary panel discussing reading). My role as invested facilitator and colleague involved asking for clarification of instructional approaches, providing perspectives from the literature, and encouraging participants to reflect on their perceptions of success with their comprehension instruction. When participants expressed challenges or

discouragement with their instruction, I attempted to encourage them to continue with implementation and solicited their ideas for their subsequent instruction.

**Third individual interview.** The purpose of the third and culminating individual interview was twofold: for participants to complete their narratives of comprehension instruction, and to reflect on their experiences with the study as a whole. The third interviews took place between April and June and were approximately 1 hour long. Semistructured questions were designed to draw on content from prior discussions and to explore participants' overall impressions of their instructional experiences and awareness of the evolution of their beliefs about reading throughout the study. As with the first and second interviews, participants were sent the protocol questions prior to the interview for their consideration.

The first portion of the interview began with individualized questions about the participants' instructional experiences following the second group sessions. These questions drew upon participants' earlier impressions of their instruction and addressed any challenges that they had expressed. Participants were then asked about their comfort level with implementing comprehension instruction as they had designed it and their impressions of student responses to their instruction. Participants were asked to describe successes and challenges associated with their instructional experiences as well as to identify any insights they gained during the initiative. Finally, participants were asked to evaluate supports they had received throughout the educational development initiative.

During the second portion of the interview, participants were asked to reflect upon their experiences with the study as a whole. Questions focused on influential elements of the initiative and participants' perceptions of changes in their beliefs about

reading, and its instruction with first- and second-year students. Participants were asked whether they had achieved the goals they set out at the beginning of the study and whether they planned to incorporate comprehension instruction in future courses.

As with previous interviews and pre-instructional dialogues, participants were sent transcripts of the final interview for comment and clarification or revision. Additionally, because final interviews took place during busy weeks at the close of the academic year, follow-up emails were sent asking participants whether, upon further reflection, they wished to expand or clarify their responses in any way. Questions for clarification of interview responses were also asked. Some participants provided copies of instructional materials used during their comprehension instruction, either during the third interview or as attachments to their final emails. These materials were used to triangulate with verbal descriptions of participants' instructional intentions and approaches (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### **Data Collection Procedures**

The phases of the study were planned in accordance with participants' schedules, a procedure that required time and flexibility in order to "cater" to multiple calendars (Yin, 2009). All interviews, pre-instructional dialogues, and group sessions were audio recorded using two small recording devices (in case of equipment failure). For each interaction, a private space was selected to optimize the quality of the audio recording as well as to ensure the participants' comfort and confidentiality (Creswell, 2013). After each interaction, the recordings were uploaded to a password-protected laptop and backed up on an external hard drive and a USB device. The laptop, external hard drive, and USB device were kept with me or in my locked office at all times. The audio recordings from

each phase of the study were transcribed by a transcriptionist (who signed a confidentiality agreement), the content of the transcriptions was checked against the recordings, and the transcriptions of each interview and pre-instructional dialogue were sent to participants for clarification or revision (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, brief summaries of prior responses or expressed positions were included in the introductions to each interview in order to provide participants with additional opportunity for revision or clarification. Member checks to allow for accuracy, clarification of specific details, or expansion of ideas were conducted via email following the final interviews. Additionally, initial data analysis continued throughout the spring and summer following the initiative, thus providing additional opportunities to verify accurate representation with participants during those semesters. Participants were invited to review and comment upon a draft of their individual narratives prior to compilation of Chapter Four of this dissertation.

In addition to interviews, pre-instructional dialogues, and group sessions, secondary forms of data collection were used. Following interactions with participants or transcription review, I wrote reflective and analytical memos in order to gather ideas for future interactions and/or data analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), consistent with Merriam and Tisdell's recommendation that data analysis should begin early in the study and continue throughout all data collection processes. In addition, four participants voluntarily provided examples of instructional materials that were used to support verbal descriptions of their comprehension instruction. These materials included handouts and articles for students, PowerPoint slides, and assignments, and provided clarification and triangulation of data from interviews and pre-instructional dialogues (Yin, 2009).

## **Data Analysis**

The 16,000 lines of data from the interviews, pre-instructional dialogues, and group sessions, as well as the documents, provided multifaceted and multivoiced views of the participants' experiences with this study (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). In consideration of the complexities of case study analysis (Merriam, 2009), data management was organized and maintained carefully. As the first phases of the study evolved, a database was established in order to organize all of the data and optimize its accessibility (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). Charts were constructed to track interactions with participants including meeting dates and transcription dissemination and response. As each phase of the study was completed, transcripts were checked and the content was utilized to form ideas for the following phases (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011, as cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

With a broad goal of answering research questions and a localized goal of developing themes for interpretation, the data were read using inductive and deductive analytical procedures for establishing codes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Open coding began by reviewing the data line-by-line and taking initial notes in order to gain an overall sense of the content (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). Based on common and repeated topics raised across the data, approximately 30 first-cycle codes emerged. Categorical aggregation was employed to establish a reduced number of categories relevant to the theoretical framework and research questions from which the study evolved (Creswell, 2013). To make the coded data more readily usable, each category was assigned a color and corresponding codes were highlighted in the relevant color. Axial coding was utilized for comparison within and across participants' data (Merriam

& Tisdell, 2016). Using a constant comparative method allowed the category scheme to be reworked and adjusted to maintain relevance as the data were reread several times (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The resultant categories informed interpretation of the data and provided the basis for reporting on the case study (Creswell, 2013).

Individual narratives were compiled by utilizing categories relevant to participants' experiential phases within the study. These included (a) disciplinary reading and teaching, (b) designing and implementing reading comprehension instruction (e.g., education literature, preparation, and reading comprehension instruction outcomes), and (c) reflecting on participation in the study. Participants were sent their narratives for member checks to ascertain their comfort with early interpretation of their experiences with the study (Yin, 2009), and no changes in the narratives were requested. The participants' narratives appear in Chapter Four.

Graphic organizers, as well as my reflective and analytical memos, informed an initial framework for an analysis of within-case similarities in which participants' common experiences and beliefs were discussed. Graphic organizers were used to represent chains of evidence (Yin, 2009) drawn from the individual narratives. These organizers included conceptual charts of relationships among elements of the study, progression of ideas throughout the narratives and their relevance to research questions, and initial threads for analysis.

The analysis of within-group similarities was framed with broad categories of participants' beliefs drawn from the individual narratives and comprising components of their reading comprehension instruction (disciplinary reading and teaching, instructional planning and development, instructional experiences, and responses to the initiative). As

data relevant to each broad category of beliefs were analyzed, subcategories of common beliefs became apparent. For example, within the broad category of disciplinary reading and teaching, it was possible to identify similar beliefs about effective academic reading, students' academic reading, students' reading comprehension, and teaching first- and second-year students. Themes emerged through analysis of participants' similar beliefs and their relevance to the literature was established. The analysis of within-case similarities appears in Chapter Five.

The individual narratives and analysis of within-case similarities emerged while engaging with the iterative and interrelated processes of data analysis described by Creswell (2013) as a spiral in which researchers move “in analytical circles rather than using a fixed linear approach” (p. 182). Engaging in analysis of participants' individual beliefs (Chapter Four) as well as their shared beliefs (Chapter Five) seemed fitting in a study attempting to create multivoiced and multifaceted representations of participants' experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Creswell's (2013) analytical spiral was extended as the question: So what? was applied to consideration of participants' shared beliefs at an intersection with larger university cultures. Implications for theory and practice, recommendations for continuing research, and personal reflection emerged as the analytical spiral was completed in Chapter Six.

### **Ethical Review and Considerations**

Ethical clearance for the study was provided by three institutions due to associations with the college on whose campus the study took place, the university in which the participants taught, and my home university (see Appendix E). In addition to following standard ethical procedures for a research study, several other factors required



consideration. Among these was my existing relationship with the majority of participants. Although I met one professor as the study began, I had taught with the other four participants for between 8 and 10 years prior to the study and had developed general impressions of their personalities and of their work, as they had of mine. The benefits of collegial familiarity within a small university included the ease with which we communicated and the respect with which we treated one another (McDermid, Peters, Jackson, & Daly, 2014). Within a research situation, however, I felt that issues of communication were foregrounded as the need for mutual trust was heightened and confidentiality was imperative. Participants' willingness to provide full disclosure also was a concern as participants might have been hesitant to reveal certain details about themselves or their practice, given our pre-existing professional relationships (McDermid et al., 2014). In response to this concern, care was taken to establish an open environment during interviews and group sessions and to emphasize my role as a co-constructor of knowledge during the study. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their participation in the study, and they were reminded of the need for mutual confidentiality regarding details of their colleagues' participation for group sessions.

Although all protocols associated with the ethical conduct of research were followed scrupulously, anonymity, particularly in data reporting, was a concern. Because of the small size of the university in which the study was conducted, and the small number of participants, demographics might have provided suggestions about the identity of individual professors. Although some identifying information was needed in order to establish context, pseudonyms were assigned and an attempt was made to limit specific details of participants and their courses. As the study unfolded, the concern about

anonymity was balanced to some degree by individual participants' willingness to share their roles and experiences in the study with colleagues. That is, some participants willingly shared information about themselves and their participation in the study knowing the limits of anonymity as explained during the informed consent process.

### **Methodological Assumptions and Limitations**

Several assumptions informed the design and implementation of this educational development initiative. Among these, it was assumed that participants were interested in issues of reading comprehension and were willing to address students' comprehension within their first- and second-year courses. This assumption was evident in the overarching purpose of the study and the content of the letter of invitation. In light of longstanding professional relationships with most of the participants, it was assumed that we would converse about reading and teaching in a relatively informal manner in order to encourage comfort with exploration of their beliefs. This assumption was reflected partially in the interview protocols but primarily in the ensuing discussions during all phases of the study. The importance of providing and adhering to evidence-based guidelines for comprehension instruction was assumed and formed a foundation upon which participants were invited to build their own instructional plans. Respect for participants' autonomous positions as professors teaching in a university precluded unsolicited commentary on the structure of their course content or their methods of delivery in any aspects other than the intersection between that content and their planning and implementation of reading comprehension instruction.

Limitations of case study research have been associated, in part, with its specificity (Yin, 2009). In this study, the originality of the research and its specificity

preclude expectations of broad generalizability. However, it is hoped that the study will contribute theoretical and practical insights useful to readers constructing their own understandings of the work (Merriam, 2009). Additional limitations may be implicit in the reliance on participants' espoused, or explicit, beliefs (Fives & Buehl, 2012).

Evidence was limited to beliefs of which participants were aware and the expression of those beliefs they chose to share. Because an intention of the study was to co-construct understanding of participants' beliefs that influenced their instructional planning, it was desirable to rely on those beliefs that participants were willing and able to discuss. An attempt was made to balance concerns about the credibility of self-reported beliefs (Fives & Buehl, 2012) through triangulation of data and member checks throughout the study. Reliance on interviewing may also have influenced the findings as participants may have anticipated desired responses to questions that they perceived were consistent with expectations for the study, with this being especially true in context of the early dissemination of interview prompts (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Fives & Buehl, 2012). In order to reduce response bias, an attempt was made to ask some questions more than once in different ways and to provide a verbal summary of previous responses as an opportunity to confirm their trustworthiness and stability (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter outlined the constructivist, inclusive theoretical underpinnings of the study's design and rationalized the choice of exploratory case study as a qualitative method. After a brief description of the site and participants, the purpose, content, and relevance of each phase of the educational development initiative were described in detail. A variety of data collection procedures was delineated as were iterative and

interrelated stages of data analysis. Finally, ethical considerations and methodological assumptions and limitations of the study were identified and discussed. While the initial design reflected the intentions and structure for the study, the participants' experiences brought the study's design to life. Narratives describing participants' experiences are presented in Chapter Four.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

This educational development initiative employed case study methodology to explore the beliefs of five university professors, Clement, Grace, Hope, Julie, and Terrance (pseudonyms), as they implemented reading comprehension instruction in their first- and second-year discipline-specific courses. Collectively, participants' teaching experience ranged from 9 years to over 30 years. Two participants were sessional while the remaining three were full time or tenured. Two taught in English studies, one in social work, one in history, and one in anthropology. Three participants selected first-year courses and the remaining two participants selected second-year courses as their foci for the study. Two of the courses were electives and two were mandatory, while one course could be completed as either an elective or major requirement. Detailed individual demographics are not included here in order to maintain participant confidentiality. This chapter describes participants' experiences with the study as narratives that subsequently are analyzed in Chapter Five.

### **Clement**

This narrative describes Clement's experiences with prior reading and teaching in history, where he presents himself as a selective reader and as a professor who introduces first-year students to university expectations. The narrative also describes Clement's design and implementation of comprehension instruction, where he focuses on reading workshops and surprise quizzes. The narrative concludes with Clement's reflection on his participation in the study, where he describes the educational development initiative as nourishing and worthwhile.

#### **Reading and Teaching in History**

When asked to describe his reading processes, at first Clement identified himself

as “a very slow, very methodical reader,” but then differentiated between reading for personal and academic purposes, with the latter being more efficient and quick.

There are two ways of reading a book for me. If I am reading something which I know I am going to use in my work... I can read it much more quickly and I know how to pick out the most important aspects of it... that is something I try to pass along to students as well. When I am reading other materials, I tend to read every single word and just absolutely consume them. (Clement, Interview One, September 13, 2013)

When asked how his reading had changed throughout his academic career, Clement described his early approach to completing assigned readings in his undergraduate history courses: “When I was in first year... I would try and find ways to cheat out of having to read as much... I would skip introductions of books. No one told me how to read a book. Ever” (Clement, Interview One, September 13, 2013). Clement postulated that disregarding key elements, such as the thesis and overview of the argument presented in a text, affected his grades in the early years of study. As he progressed through his degree programs, Clement learned from experience to read introductions thoroughly and to mine bibliographies for resources. He also learned to scan through text for argument, to scan for specific words in paragraphs and read selections relevant to his area of study, and to take coded notes. In his scholarly work, Clement utilized this detailed approach to reading and maintained electronic notes on each book he “dissected.”

Every time I read academic works, I always have a computer next to me now... and make what I call chapter notes. If I want to go back into a book, I can just pull [the notes] up on the computer. (Clement, Interview One, September 13, 2013)

Clement believed that he understood university standards for writing and reading, and perceived that instructors' roles included introducing students to those standards and maintaining them consistently through grading and lectures. He believed that approaching the study of history as an exercise in memorization was limiting in terms of knowledge construction as well as practical application in nonacademic arenas. Instead, Clement preferred to describe studying history as analogous to "learning communication skills: reading, critical thinking, being able to organize your thoughts, being able to express those thoughts orally and in written form" (First Group Session, October 10, 2013). Clement believed that these processes comprised the "focus of history... of doing a degree in history" (First Group Session, October 10, 2013), and he deliberately emphasized the importance of developing these processes with his students.

Clement utilized the terms deconstruction and reconstruction to characterize teaching first-year students. He compared these processes to the deprogramming of civilians entering military service and their subsequent reprogramming as soldiers. High school graduates, he believed, entered university with attitudes toward education that could be counter-productive to their success in university.

They might come in with a certain set of expectations that would not allow them to succeed at the university level. I start deconstructing all those attitudes from high school and then... instill expectations of them at the university level.

(Clement, Interview One, September 13, 2013)

For example, Clement incorporated an essay-writing workshop into his first-year course to help students understand university-level expectations relevant to writing in history.

I find if you just let that [set of writing skills] develop on its own... students don't

benefit from it nearly as much as [if a professor] just stands up and actually tells them what they need to do and how it is different than high school. "This is what you might have done in high school, this is how we do it in university. This is what you might have understood in high school, this is what we do in university."

(Clement, Interview One, September 13, 2013)

The essay writing workshop focused specifically on selecting and documenting resources correctly and structuring an essay to include an argument. Following the workshop, Clement assigned associated tasks (i.e., writing an annotated bibliography, analyzing websites) to complement and reinforce the workshop content.

Clement viewed reading as "a fundamental part of the learning experience in university" and believed that "if you don't do it, you fall behind" (Clement, Interview One, September 13, 2013). He viewed first-year students as readers who relied heavily on the Internet for information and often sought out the details of historical occurrences rather than the essence of historical arguments. "They want the dates and names. Or that's what they think is important, at least, as opposed to really understanding the author's position, the real point of the argument" (First Group Session, October 10, 2013). Clement also believed that first-year students often did not realize the importance of peer reviewed journals and were unable to differentiate between primary and secondary sources. Additionally, although he believed that "the first-year level is pretty simple," Clement acknowledged that students could become overwhelmed and that they needed instruction in how to approach academic reading. "One of the major things I find is that a lot of them read in a nonacademic way. They are absorbing every word. I think that they could benefit from learning how to read a book academically" (Clement,



Interview One, September 13, 2013). Clement was aware of occasional student complaints about the amount of reading assigned in his course and believed that many students did not complete the readings. He attributed this to students' prior experiences with reading history where they might have been encouraged to memorize information rather than to read critically and selectively. He also believed that without grades attached to completion of reading assignments, students might not complete the readings.

### **Designing and Implementing Reading Comprehension Instruction**

When asked about his goals and motivation for participating in this study, Clement expressed a desire to learn different teaching techniques and ways of assessing reading comprehension. He characterized himself as “willing to try new things” and looked forward to collaboration with other faculty on a “personal level of development” (Clement, Interview One, September 13, 2013). Clement associated his motivation for participating in the study with his awareness of the need for increased attention to reading comprehension:

I do think reading comprehension needs to be taken a bit more seriously. It's one of the key building blocks of university education and if we can get students to understand how to read properly...then I think [participation in this study] will be something really worthwhile. (Clement, Interview One, September 13, 2013)

For the purposes of the study, Clement focused on a required first-year course that also served as an elective for nonmajors. The course was completed predominantly by first-year students but typically also included a few upper-year students. The course was taught across two semesters, with more than half of the 30 – 35 students from the fall semester completing the second part of the course in the winter semester.

Clement chose a two-volume textbook for the course that included suggestions for primary sources in each chapter. Each week, students were asked to read one chapter from the textbook (approximately 30 pages) that was relevant to the class lecture and a primary and/or secondary source reading (40-60 pages) that was relevant to the seminar discussion following the lecture. Clement expected students to “read enough... and understand it so they could participate in seminars and ... succeed in the final exam” (Clement, Interview One, September 13, 2013). Students were graded on verbal participation in seminar discussions, and Clement utilized the frequency and quality of their participation as indicators of their reading comprehension. Clement attributed students’ quietness during seminars or references to irrelevant, inaccurate, nonacademic information and/or personal experiences as evidence of a lack of reading comprehension. He indicated, however, that he could not be certain of students’ reading completion or comprehension unless they approached him for assistance:

It is very difficult to tell how much reading [students are completing] on a regular basis and how they are dealing with it. Unless they specifically come up to you and say, “I am having a problem getting all this reading done,” ...it is really only at that point that I can approach them and say, "This is how you read a book."

(Clement, Interview One, September 13, 2013)

**The education literature.** Following the first group session, Clement was sent one article relevant to his interest in reading historical documents as well as the articles sent to all participants in the study. Clement read six of the articles and began the second interview with an overview of ideas he had taken from the literature and planned to incorporate into his courses.

I did find an awful lot of interesting information in a few of them. And from that, I was able to formulate a number of different things which I have already started to include in the syllabi for next semester. (Clement, Interview Two, December 13, 2013)

Clement seemed especially interested in Berry et al.'s (2011) discussion of methods that could be used to encourage reading compliance among university students. Among those methods were essay quizzes, surprise quizzes, and nonrandom quizzes. Pecorari et al. (2012) also mentioned surprise quizzes in the context of a study attempting to determine students' reading compliance. Neither article suggested that quizzes were associated directly with assessment of reading comprehension. Clement gleaned from the articles the idea of introducing "snap quizzes" in his first-year course in order to encourage completion of the assigned readings and suggested that as a by-product, the quiz results might indicate "gaps" in students' reading. He allocated 5% of the semester grade to the completion of five surprise quizzes consisting of five multiple-choice questions each. As a sessional instructor, Clement weighed the risk of negative student response to these quizzes:

Will that make me the most hated professor on campus? They are not going to like it... So I am expecting I might get a bit of a dip in student ratings because of this but I will just have to make it up another way. (Clement, Interview Two, December 13, 2013)

Once Clement had chosen quizzes as a way to motivate students to complete reading assignments, we discussed a complementary instructional component that could help students to complete the assigned reading successfully.

Cynthia: Looking at my notes, I'm wondering if there is a component of actual instruction on how to read...

Clement: After the very first quiz, we could see what results come back... and take up some of the answers and explain them. The other thing that I can provide is information on Blackboard about how to read. There is a number of different websites.

Cynthia: Do you think they would read to learn to read? Or would they rather hear it?

Clement: Oh, that's a good question. I think that they will probably listen to me and half of them, or maybe less, will go and actually read the websites.

Cynthia: So would you give some sort of introduction?

Clement: Yeah... while I was taking up the quiz questions then I could talk about how to read. (Interview Two, December 13, 2013)

Clement conceptualized a miniworkshop on reading for history similar to his essay-writing workshop. The importance of providing reading instruction relevant to the assigned readings as well as the importance of hands-on practice during class was discussed. Clement planned to administer the first quiz and to review answers to it as an introduction to the miniworkshop. Clement invited me to provide an introduction to the study during the initial class and to observe the miniworkshop on reading. He planned to review quiz answers and to remind students of the reading strategies he had presented during the miniworkshop throughout the remaining weeks of the semester.

**Instructional preparation.** After our initial discussion about how Clement would address reading comprehension in his course, he began our pre-instructional dialogue by

providing the results of the first surprise quiz. The scores varied from 1 to 5 correct out of 5 questions with on average 3.4 correct answers. Clement's interpretation of the results was that "some of them clearly did the reading, some of them clearly didn't" (Clement, Pre-Instructional Dialogue, January 30, 2014).

Focused on planning the miniworkshop on reading for the following day's class, Clement asked me to introduce the study to the students first and emphasize the importance of effective reading practices in university. Then he planned to return the quizzes and review the correct responses by projecting relevant sections of the text associated with each question. From there he planned to review a short PowerPoint presentation outlining key strategies for textbook reading (relevant to selectivity), seminar reading (relevant to contextualization), and reading for research essays (relevant to purposefulness). He anticipated completing the study introduction, quiz review, and PowerPoint presentation in the first hour of class.

As we reviewed the content of the slides Clement had prepared, it became evident that the scope of the miniworkshop would need to be scaled back. In the section on strategies for textbook reading, for example, Clement had included questions such as:

- What is the theme?
- What are the most important events? People? Concepts? Ideas?
- Is the author trying to make a point about something?
- What conclusions are made in this chapter? (Clement, Pre-Instructional Dialogue, January 30, 2014).

Clement was asked how students could learn to identify each of the elements incorporated in his questions (e.g., theme, critical events, and conclusions). It soon

became apparent that if he were to include full explanations of specific processes and strategies for deducing these elements from textbooks as well as covering other processes relevant to seminar and research readings, there would be too much material for 1 hour. It was suggested that narrowing the focus of the miniworkshop to reading textbooks only might be sufficient, particularly if his instruction included presentation of reading strategies, modelling the strategies in association with the textbook, and asking students to practice using the strategies. Clement acknowledged that if these elements were included, the miniworkshop on reading textbooks only would contain sufficient content to make it worthwhile.

Once the scope of the miniworkshop had been determined, we discussed the specific strategies that would be presented. These included using textual features as indicators of the organization of content and locating main ideas by reading topic sentences and conclusions of paragraphs or sections. Clement was concerned that the more experienced students in the class might dominate the discussion of textbook reading strategies. He wanted to include a group activity incorporating the strategies so that more experienced students could assist those who were less experienced. We discussed his intended purpose for the group activity as well as several options for content.

Clement struggled to select an authentic reading with which the strategies should be associated. Specifically, he was unsure whether to utilize familiar passages that students had read previously, or to utilize unfamiliar passages to which students could apply strategies in an attempt to construct meaning for the first time. After discussion, Clement chose to utilize familiar passages from the reading assigned for the day of the miniworkshop, which he thought would help students to appreciate more immediately the

relevance of the strategies and minimize confusion with instructional content. Clement wanted students to use the strategies to analyze sections of the assigned textbook chapter, but was unsure which sections of the chapter should be included and which could be omitted for this discussion.

As we attempted to determine the details of each aspect of the miniworkshop on reading comprehension, the painstaking nature of this process became evident. Each aspect (scope, specific strategies for instruction, reinforcement through group activity, authentic reading for application) required consideration of its individual content as well as its relation to the other elements. At one point Clement seemed frustrated by the slow pace of our progress and compared instruction on academic reading to the workshop on academic writing he had already designed: “It just seems like we are right now back to square one again... it is so much easier to teach students how to write an essay... Teaching them how to read a textbook is significantly harder” (Clement, Pre-Instructional Dialogue, January 30, 2014). As we worked through further details of the miniworkshop, Clement articulated the struggle he was experiencing: “I think the difficulty I am having is trying to connect the [strategy instruction with the] textbook readings, the lectures, and the quizzes that I have been giving them. That’s the issue that I am really having” (Clement, Pre-Instructional Dialogue, January 30, 2014). After an hour and a half, Clement ended the pre-instructional dialogue and identified the time pressure he had been feeling:

OK. Leave this with me, Cynthia, and we will see how it emerges... I will figure it out somehow. Even if it takes me all night... the consequences of doing this I guess the day before - like a bad student. (Clement, Pre-Instructional Dialogue,

January 30, 2014)

At the end of the study, I asked Clement if he could explain further his frustration during the pre-instructional dialogue. He recalled the difficulty of attempting to insert comprehension instruction into a completed syllabus. He also acknowledged that receiving coaching about the miniworkshop had actually complicated his instruction because he realized that it would take more class time than he initially expected.

I was getting frustrated because I was having to insert an instruction lesson into an already made course... I feel that if I had designed the course with the reading instruction as part of it from the beginning, it would have been a lot less frustrating and a lot more organic. A second part of that was, I have to admit, due to your input. I had asked for your expertise with some of the material, and you had some great suggestions which needed to be included ... but I realized that it needed to be a three-part series rather than a one-shot lecture. That complicated my approach and forced me to completely revisit my instructional strategy for the whole course. (Clement, Personal Communication, May 21, 2014)

**Instructional outcomes.** On the day of the miniworkshop, Clement reviewed the first surprise quiz and then presented a 10-slide lecture on reading academically. The lecture began with three statements about reading history that Clement characterized as true or false and then discussed:

- I need to read every word from my textbook (false)
- I should never skip whole sections/paragraphs in my textbook (false)
- I may have to read a section more than once to understand its meaning  
(true)



In an attempt to express his belief that effective reading in history must be selective, Clement then presented a golden rule of reading: “Academic material in history is not meant to be *actually* read. It is meant to be ransacked and pillaged for essential content!” (Clement, Personal Communication, January 31, 2014). In his explanation of this golden rule, Clement emphasized reading purposefully and discouraged rereading as an immediate response to perceived lack of comprehension:

Rather than automatically rereading, take a few seconds to quiz yourself on the material you have just read and then review those sections that are still unclear or confusing to you. The most effective way of spending each study hour is to devote as little time as possible to reading and as much time as possible to making notes, reviewing, organizing, and relating the concepts and facts. Spend your time learning ideas, not painfully processing words visually. (Clement, Personal Communication, January 31, 2014)

Clement then identified three types of reading that would be necessary in his history course and the purposes of each: (a) textbook reading (to understand background information on topics); (b) seminar reading (to understand historical context and multiple perspectives on topics); and (c) reading for research essays (to locate and understand support for argumentative positions on topics). Drawing the students’ attention to textbook reading, the focus of the miniworkshop, Clement provided several questions for students to consider as they completed their weekly reading:

- What is the theme for this week? Is it a particular era or event?
- What information is essential and what is rubbish?
- What are the most important events, people, concepts, and ideas?

- Is the author trying to make a point about something?
- What conclusions are made in this chapter? (Clement, Personal Communication, January 31, 2014)

In order to help students address these questions for consideration as they read, Clement recommended five specific strategies that they might employ:

- Check the syllabus: the title for this week's class may give you a hint [of the theme].
- Check the chapter title: what are the major concepts that will be discussed?
- Check the textual features: bolding, headings, italics, boxes, questions, etc.
- Read (and re-read) the topic sentence and conclusion in each sub-section or paragraph (these are usually the first and last sentences).
- Mark the text or take notes as you read. (Clement, Personal Communication, January 31, 2014)

After he had presented these strategies for reading the textbook, Clement provided an opportunity for students to practice with the day's assigned chapter reading. Relevant to locating the theme for the week and information essential to that theme, Clement asked students to identify "absolutely necessary," "possibly necessary," and "unnecessary" sections of the chapter reading utilizing the syllabus, the chapter title, and the significant textual features. He then assigned students to groups of four, asking each group to read a section of the chapter defined as necessary and select three key points utilizing topic sentences and conclusions of paragraphs. Each group was asked to present its key points on the blackboard for discussion. Clement believed that students understood the concepts

he presented and that they found the exercise helpful.

They were able to do and look at some of the things we highlighted in that instruction. From that [they were able to] get a better idea about what might be important, what might not be important. Then I asked them afterwards whether or not they found that experience particularly enjoyable or particularly helpful, and they all responded that they thought it was. (Clement, Interview Three, April 11, 2014)

The week after the miniworkshop, Clement had students complete a second surprise quiz. He found the results very disappointing, with an average mark of 2.3 out of 5 correct. During the second group session, Clement described the timing of the quiz and expressed his concern about the results:

The day I handed out that quiz was also the day that their assignment was due, this Internet sources assignment. My understanding is that they spent the whole time doing the internet sources assignment and... paid no attention whatsoever to the readings that week. So I don't know whether this is symptomatic of them not understanding the workshop that I did with them, still struggling with [how to read their textbooks], or whether it's just a case of laziness because of the assignment. (Second Group Session, February 13, 2014)

Two weeks after the second quiz, Clement presented a 45-minute lecture on reading for research. The purpose of the lecture was to review concepts from the initial miniworkshop and connect these approaches to reading source material efficiently. After reminding students about the golden rule of reading for history (pillaging for necessary content rather than reading every word), Clement provided specific tips reemphasizing

selectivity and purposefulness (i.e., setting realistic timeframes for reading, reading with specific questions in mind). Clement provided additional instruction on reading primary and secondary sources for seminar discussions later in the semester. The purpose of this instruction was to assist students with creating focus for their reading and formulating ideas for contributions to seminar discussions. Specific to primary source material, Clement encouraged students to ask questions such as these:

- In what context is this document written?
- Who is the intended audience?
- What kind of document is this?
- What does this tell us about the attitudes/opinions of the time?
- Can we “read between the lines” a bit here? Is there anything behind this?
- How does this tie in with other documents? (Clement, Personal Communication, May 21, 2014)

In order to answer these questions, students were encouraged to “read the editorial section fully” to find context for the document, to “check the title” for audience and date, and to “look at the use of language” in the document in order to discover tone and indications of bias (Clement, Personal Communication, May 21, 2014).

During the remaining weeks of the semester, Clement administered two additional surprise quizzes to gauge students’ completion of assigned reading. As he described the outcomes of the four quizzes, he commented on the variability of results and identified a difficulty with relying on quizzes to indicate students’ comprehension.

Some of them really caught on with that, some of them were stuck in a rut, probably because they are not doing any of the readings. So I don’t know whether

[some students' quiz results are low] just because they are not doing the readings or they are doing the readings still poorly. (Clement, Interview Three, April 11, 2014)

It was suggested that it might be unrealistic to expect dramatic changes in student reading compliance or comprehension after only one semester of providing instruction. Clement acknowledged that he had hoped student compliance would improve dramatically: "I think you are right. And I think that's actually an error in my calculation because I think I was kind of expecting to see radical results. And that didn't happen" (Clement, Interview Three, April 11, 2014). Although he noted improved quiz results among some students, Clement also expressed his recognition that quizzes could not necessarily indicate improvement in comprehension.

Some people have done incredibly well... like one student went 3, 2, 5, 5. There was another student that went 1, 3, 3, 5. Another one... went 2, 1, 5, 5. So there's a handful of students that I think really caught on to this. Maybe out of this class of 23, maybe in 5 students you can see a drastic improvement in these quizzes. At the same time, these quizzes are also very artificial. (Clement, Interview Three, April 11, 2014)

At the end of the semester, Clement asked his students for verbal feedback on the strategy instruction and the surprise quizzes:

So I asked them all these questions in the exam review last week. And I said to them... "Did this make you read more?" And they said "yes." I don't know if they were just humoring me, it's possible. "Were you more likely to read because you thought you had a quiz?" "Yes." Almost unanimously, very quickly they were

answering this. "Did my instruction standing up in front of the class help you?"

And they said "yes." So that's good... but I would do a few things differently.

(Clement, Interview Three, April 11, 2014)

### **Study Reflections**

Halfway through the study, I asked Clement to reflect on his experiences as a participant. As he recalled the first group session, Clement identified commonalities among the participants representing three different disciplines (history, English, anthropology).

It was interesting because we are all from different disciplines... we have the same sort of opinion of what a student's approach is to the material. I think that the techniques we use are very similar, [as is] the concern over professor workload...I also feel that the goals of the professors are very similar in many ways. (Clement, Interview Two, December 13, 2013)

Consistent with his desire to learn new techniques of instruction, Clement identified paraphrasing and writing short responses to readings, both of which had been discussed during the group session as two possible skill sets for inclusion in his courses. Clement expressed regret that he had not met all of the other participants in the study, due to scheduling problems, and, therefore, did not have a sense of the whole group.

When asked whether he was aware of changes in his thinking about first-year students' reading, Clement said that he had become "a lot more hopeful."

That is a big thing because... before I took part in this study, I was just sort of resigned to [giving] them a textbook and [knowing] they were never going to read it. I am feeling that reading instruction needs to be thought about a lot more by

professors. As much as the students take it for granted, I think in many ways it is something that professors take for granted as well. All of these different articles agree with me to a certain extent. I think that we need to be a bit more proactive and ... make [reading] a much larger priority... maybe we should start thinking about doing workshops... I am actually feeling very positive about some of these things. (Clement, Interview Two, December 13, 2013)

Clement was asked to reflect on how his students had progressed during the fall semester and how he believed they were poised to enter the winter semester where comprehension instruction would take place. Clement mentioned several instances of “myth-busting” during first semester and characterized many of the students as well-prepared to move toward the second half of the course. He also believed that many students had not completed assigned readings during the first semester and speculated that providing direct instruction in reading comprehension strategies during the second semester might be a “good step” toward addressing this problem.

During reflection near the end of the study, Clement reported feeling “100% comfortable” with addressing reading comprehension in his second-semester course despite his initial frustration with planning his comprehension instruction.

I felt it was something I needed to do. I knew most of the students, I knew what their abilities were, for the most part, what their inabilities were, what their struggles were. I had quite a good rapport with the class because of that. The only downside was it was a bit frustrating trying to plan it. The actual implementation of it was smooth as silk. (Clement, Interview Three, April 11, 2014)

Although he was very comfortable addressing reading comprehension, Clement did not

see the desired congruity between his instruction and students' performance scores on the surprise quizzes. He had expected that if students completed reading assignments more frequently and effectively, they should be able to answer quiz questions correctly and their scores should improve consistently.

I [expected] cause and effect in many ways, like I am going to stand up here and I am going to teach them this and they are going to learn it and it is going to reflect in my results. And of course, that wasn't the case at all. I mean there hasn't been... a massive shift. Some of the students have done really, really well. Some of them are stagnated. (Clement, Interview Three, April 11, 2014)

Clement spoke about the five students in the course whose quiz scores had improved dramatically during the semester. He felt that his reading instruction had been helpful to them and that the increase in their scores had made his efforts worthwhile. We discussed the difficulty of trying to gauge improvement in reading comprehension on the basis of quizzes within the context of the complexities of assessing reading comprehension in general in a first-year university course. Clement agreed that the process was more complex than he had originally thought it would be: "I think that's it... there isn't necessarily a cause and effect. I think this is a long process. One semester is not long enough to do this properly, really" (Clement, Interview Three, April 11, 2014).

Clement was surprised by two elements of his experience working with the students throughout this study. First, he was shocked by the number of hours some students reported that it took them to complete the readings (more than 3 hours per week):

I didn't realize they were spending that much time reading. They must be reading



every word like it's a romance novel. You know you just can't do that. It's just not academically viable. You get to fourth year and if you are still doing that, you are going to be in real trouble. (Clement, Interview Three, April 11, 2014)

Second, Clement was surprised that students responded favorably to his inclusion of reading comprehension instruction during class.

I learned that they actually in many ways quite enjoyed this. They enjoyed doing the workshops... which I thought they would not. I mean they don't like doing the quizzes, but they actually got a kick out of some of the things. (Clement, Interview Three, April 11, 2014)

Over all, Clement characterized his reading comprehension instruction experience as a success. He planned to continue to address reading comprehension the next time he taught the first-year course and identified two intended changes in his instructional plan. First, he would begin instruction early in the fall semester and carry it through into the winter semester. "That way you've got 8 months... then you could track it right across... and maybe include something else... just stretch it out" (Clement, Interview Three, April 11, 2014). The second change involved a fuller integration of reading comprehension instruction with course content to construct "something a little bit more organically" that would be less disjointed and less of a "shock to the students" (Clement, Interview Three, April 11, 2014).

Clement planned to retain the essay-writing workshop in the second half of the course and begin the year with the instruction related to academic reading in the first half of the course. He also planned to introduce a textbook relevant to reading and writing academically as a reference. Certain that he could "handle the groans of the class,"

Clement intended to continue to use surprise quizzes throughout the year to check on students' completion of assigned textbook chapters.

At the end of the third interview, Clement reflected on his experience as a participant in the research study. He mentioned the articles as the most useful element of the study as they provided him with previously unfamiliar background information:

Some of them talk about motivation, what might motivate students, what might work. And I think they should almost be required reading for [professors]... you don't necessarily know how to teach. You can get professors that are incredible researchers but aren't necessarily very good in the classroom. (Clement, Interview Three, April 11, 2014)

Clement felt that his original beliefs about the need to address reading comprehension with first-year students were "entirely reinforced" during the study.

The students need this. They need it critically. And I think that some of the work we have done together... needs to be opened up so more people can do this. I think it has really shown that you can get results. You can, you know, influence the way in which first-year students read. (Clement, Interview Three, April 11, 2014)

Clement described his participation in the study as time consuming but worthwhile as he had learned that professors can assist first-year students to improve their reading comprehension.

It's been quite a lot of work... from an hour to hour standpoint, but it has been nourishing, it's been sort of eye-opening in a sense, it's given me an outlet in many ways for the frustration because now I know how to turn the frustration that

none of the students are doing any reading into "Let's do something about that."

It's that epiphany I think that more professors need to have because I hear it all the time – it's, "Well, students aren't going to do the reading anyway. So why do I bother?" That's really annoying for me because there are things you can do about it. (Clement, Interview Three, April 11, 2014)

### **Summary**

Clement believed that selectivity was the key to reading extensively and effectively in history. He believed that students needed to strengthen their communication skills, including reading and writing, and incorporated a writing workshop in his first-year course. Clement's comprehension instruction incorporated a reading workshop that he believed was well-received by students, as well as surprise quizzes that he believed improved reading compliance. In terms of educational development, he appreciated gaining exposure to education literature and collaborating with colleagues. Over all, Clement viewed the initiative as an enlightening experience and intended to continue comprehension instruction in future courses.

### **Grace**

This narrative describes Grace's experiences with prior reading and teaching in anthropology, where she presents herself as an active, comprehensive reader and as a professor who encourages first-year students to prepare for their future careers. The narrative also describes Grace's design and implementation of comprehension instruction, where she focuses on research articles used in various contexts across a semester. The narrative concludes with Grace's reflection on her participation in the

study, where she describes the educational development initiative as an interesting learning experience.

### **Reading and Teaching in Anthropology**

Grace described herself as a “hard-copy kind of reader” who read “broadly”:

I’m a hard-copy kind of reader because I am... a little bit old school; ...I tend to want to print [articles] so that I can mark them up as opposed to [reading them] electronically. I still have a Kobo reader that I have yet to actually hook up to anything. (Grace, Interview One, September 19, 2013)

Grace read fiction and nonfiction for pleasure as well as historical pieces to inform her current work: “Right now with current campaigns against certain chemicals that are used in conventional farming..., I am rereading the approaches from Rachel Carson and *Silent Spring* from the ‘50s, a pioneering book on environmental studies” (Grace, Interview One, September 19, 2013). She described her need to maintain awareness of issues within “two very broad, holistic fields” and cited her reliance on alerts, through listservs and other electronic means, to identify “key material” in anthropology (incorporating her speciality in primatology) and the environment. “Because I come from a collaborative Ph.D., I have to read very broadly across anthropology and environmental studies which covers both social science and hard science” (Grace, Interview One, September 19, 2013).

Grace attributed changes in the content of her reading over the years to shifts in the availability of academic resources: “We used to just read... textbooks and books that were assigned. I didn’t even know what a journal was until third year... it wasn’t until graduate level that reading packages with journal articles were assigned” (Grace,

Interview One, September 19, 2013). Because she had not been introduced to journal articles early in her own academic studies, Grace believed that she should introduce her first-year students to scholarly material and integrate it into discussions of current topics covered in their course textbook: “in my courses I use journal articles as part of exercises in the scaffolding toward understanding” (Grace, Interview One, September 19, 2013). In addition to journal articles, Grace had used a variety of resources in her teaching including an online lab that allowed students to participate in a virtual archeology dig and a website designed to help students understand “their own racial biases” through identification of facial features (First Group Session, October 10, 2013). Grace also used videos to supplement readings and encouraged students to engage in group discussions of particular topics.

Grace taught anthropology courses from a bio-cultural perspective that incorporated concepts of biological adaptation and cultural influence: “We are not just biologically adapted but we are influenced by our culture [which] actually influences our biology” (Grace, Interview Two, November 7, 2013). As part of her instructional content, Grace introduced her students to the concept that humans are animals that have adapted over time as biological beings. She also introduced cultural processes (i.e., early “stone making [and] pasturing animals”) that have influenced biological changes in humans. Against this historical backdrop, she challenged students to think about their future, asking questions such as, “Where are we going with technology?” (Grace, Interview Two, November 7, 2013). Grace sought out course materials that illustrated this “linkage” of the cultural impact on biology and challenged her students to develop

appreciation for the depth of human development over time – “that we weren’t just born with iPods and remotes in hand” (Grace, Interview One, September 19, 2013).

Grace acknowledged challenges associated with teaching first-year students and deliberately focused on establishing the relevance of course material to first-year students’ lives:

Teaching first-year versus third- or fourth-year courses, I find, is very different. I think that it is harder to engage first-year students and keep their attention... they may be trying to feel out what they might be interested in or fulfilling an elective. So, trying to keep the material relevant to what’s going on broadly across that population, you have to be more engaging and find those connections, or help students to make those connections. (Grace, Interview One, September 19, 2013)

As a sessional instructor teaching elective courses in anthropology, Grace acknowledged that most of her first-year students would never become anthropologists and, therefore, believed that they needed to leave her course with a “set of skills to move forward into their academic careers or into other professional fields... writing a basic essay, [and learning] how to study and digest material” (Grace, Interview One, September 19, 2013). Grace contextualized skills associated with reading (e.g., “critical thinking, getting your hands on appropriate materials to help build a sound argument”) for students in terms of their professional goals so that they could “see the importance of the skill of being able to comprehend whatever it is that they are reading” (First Group Session, October 10, 2013).

Grace deliberately incorporated scaffolding into her teaching and encouraged students to take “responsibility as young adults in a university setting” (Grace, Interview

One, September 19, 2013). Specifically, she challenged and encouraged them to build their understanding of course content each week by reviewing material continuously.

Grace also drew students' attention to the way that topics for class discussion progressed from week to week and encouraged students to ask questions:

I'll say, "We covered the basis of this in week 5, or we covered the basis of this in week two," [for example] understanding what a gene is, versus what we are talking about now in terms of epigenetics. If I am not clear, I am very open in terms of communication, usually by email. (First Group Session, October 10, 2013)

As students became familiar with journal articles, she provided tips and questions for them to ask that would "help with their reading and critical evaluation":

- Read the abstract.
- Read the conclusion.
- Is the article by an anthropologist?
- How long was the study?
- Where did it take place? (Grace, Interview One, September 19, 2013)

For the purposes of evaluating whether an article was suitable for providing validation of a point, Grace encouraged students to consider how evidence is weighted and incorporated in argumentative writing. She asked, "Is this article something that you want to put a lot of weight on, or should you be collecting more articles and trying to read more and understand what the main perspectives are on this one particular point?"

(Grace, Interview One, September 19, 2013)

Grace believed that students struggled most in her classes with content-specific vocabulary: “jargon, jargon, jargon. It can be very exclusionary to students, a lot of words that they may not understand” (Grace, Interview One, September 19, 2013). To address students’ struggles with vocabulary, Grace deliberately chose contemporary textbooks that highlighted or bolded unfamiliar words and then defined them in the sidebars. In her lectures, she called attention to vocabulary that might be unfamiliar to students: “I find if I use those terms during lecturing, particularly the key ones that I know are going to come up in the next two or three chapters... that tends to play out pretty well” (Grace, Interview One, September 19, 2013).

During the first group session, Grace questioned whether students took sufficient time to engage with complex and lengthy academic reading assignments, particularly since she believed that they were more familiar with reading short passages of text online:

Grace: I am just wondering about the amount of reading that’s assigned... how much [students] are actually going to read because if they don’t have a sound bite every 35 seconds, they are off to something else. How do you teach that it takes longer to read the 44 pages that you have assigned?

Cynthia: It is such an important question.

Grace: I struggle with this in class. (First Group Session, October 10, 2013)

Grace and the other participants discussed the advice they provided for students about reading hard copy versus digital text and differentiating scholarly materials from other sources of information:



Julie: I continue to teach the old-fashioned way, I think. When they are going to do a research paper, I say, "Go through a number of articles. You can look at them on the databases online, pick out the ones you want that are important, and print them off. Then you can mark them up." I don't know any other way because I can't see myself doing research without hard copies of the printed material. Do you find that they can do that successfully – just depend on online sources?

Clement: I tend more towards evaluating online material for its credibility... I do an online internet source assignment. The emphasis is on what is acceptable versus not acceptable at the university level...

Grace: Students have no comprehension that a database is much beyond a website... so I bring in hard copies [of journals] and [relate those to articles in databases]. I ask, "What is a tertiary source, what is a primary source, what's a secondary source? What's a magazine versus a journal?" (First Group Session, October 10, 2013)

Grace believed that first-year students need help with reading comprehension, particularly with learning the differences among types of scholarly material, and she was willing to offer such assistance in her classes. She also supported the idea of free-standing courses or workshops on academic reading for students as she believed that reading was the foundational skill for any discipline or profession: "It's really important to whatever you are going to do ultimately" (Grace, Interview One, September 19, 2013). After her many years of teaching, however, Grace had come to believe that within each group of first-year students, some would comprehend their academic reading and others would not, largely dependent upon the effort they invested in their studies.

There tends to be a set number of students who do the work in an organized manner, who get it, and [that's] where the comprehension comes. And there is a whole set of students who are just screwing around on the computers; they're Facebooking even though I don't want them to and they are distracting other people...So I think there is a whole set of students [for whom] it doesn't matter if they are not going to comprehend because they are not trying to. They just can't be bothered. (Grace, Interview One, September 19, 2013)

### **Designing and Implementing Reading Comprehension Instruction**

When asked about her goals for participation in this study, Grace expressed interest in learning more about the influence of online reading on today's students: "I have wondered about that, but I have never actually looked up the literature" (Grace, Interview One, September 19, 2013). For the purposes of the study, Grace focused on her first-year course, an elective designed primarily for first-year students that was also open to upper-year students who needed to fulfill an elective requirement. Prior to the commencement of the study, anthropology had been offered as a major in the university. Presently, anthropology courses were offered as electives only, and class sizes were reduced from approximately 90 to 50-60 students per class.

Grace spoke about the evolution of anthropology textbooks from "typically very thick, dull, and boring, often written by a team" to textbooks that were "much more readable... much more attached to the everyday lives of students" (Grace, Interview One, September 19, 2013). Grace commented on noticeable differences in authorship of the current textbooks:

We didn't have very good selection 2 decades ago, and subsequently we have had a couple of anthropologists who have educational backgrounds and you can see that in the way that they are writing and in terms of the digestibility of the material. (Grace, Interview One, September 19, 2013)

In addition to their readability, Grace selected current textbooks on the basis of their Canadian content:

If you are a Canadian student you are going to get in any textbook the important paradigms of the discipline, but I think that it behooves us as Canadians to learn more about how we have contributed [to the field of anthropology]. (Grace, Interview One, September 19, 2013)

Typically, Grace assigned one or two chapters (20–40 pages per chapter) from the textbook as a weekly reading. Additionally, students were asked to read one journal article every 2 to 3 weeks. Grace expected students to read the assigned material before coming to class and then to re-read portions of that same material as a way to build understanding of key course concepts as the semester progressed and to review for the final exam. Grace gauged students' comprehension by the depth of the questions they asked in class and by their participation in group discussions. She also noted a decrease in completion of weekly readings as the semester progressed:

If they are scrambling or they are flipping through the text, it is because they either haven't read or haven't comprehended the text. I find that ... as the semester goes on, their reading [completion decreases]... because they get [many] other assignments. I find that they think they are going to [be able to study the

anthropology material just] before the exam. (Grace, Interview One, September 19, 2013)

**The education literature.** Of the three articles provided during the first group session, Grace found the Alexander (2005) article interesting and useful, specifically its suggestion that individuals may learn to read for different situations several times in their lives and may need guidance as they acclimate to each new reading situation. Grace connected the need for reading guidance to the introduction to academic reading she provided in her first-year course:

So it is important in first year – while it may seem like common language to me, it must be very foreign to them – to discuss what a journal article is, to begin to lay down those foundations in first year and hopefully that [introduction will help students] to do research and find material for validating arguments later on in any profession. (Grace, Interview Two, November 7, 2013)

During our first and second interviews, Grace outlined several elements of the introduction to academic reading that she provided for her first-year students. By deliberately selecting a digestible and relevant textbook, Grace introduced her students to accessible academic reading. Incorporating the vocabulary utilized within the textbook during her lectures reinforced the need for students to familiarize themselves with disciplinary-specific language and to develop an understanding of its contexts. Grace introduced first-year students to scholarly material by discussing purposes, typical organizational patterns, and tips for reading journal articles. Within the context of instruction on using APA documentation, Grace asked students to paraphrase material from journal articles and discussed qualities of effective paraphrases with the students.

By including tips in her syllabus, Grace encouraged students to maintain comprehension of course material through weekly cumulative reviews, and she reminded students of their responsibility to ask questions when they did not understand assigned readings. Through all of these actions during her first-year course, Grace demonstrated her belief in the importance of introducing students to the particularities of academic study and attempted to assist her students in their transition to university-level reading.

After the first group session, Grace was provided with an additional article particular to her interest in students' online reading. Sandberg's (2011) synthesis of research on university students' online reading experiences described highly computer-literate students who became confused while reading e-books and ultimately preferred using print, rather than electronic, versions of textbooks. Grace commented on Sandberg's descriptions of students who followed hyperlinks in electronic text and had difficulty returning to the primary discussions as well as students who had difficulties annotating electronic text. Prior to reading the article, Grace had considered recommending that students purchase the electronic version of her text because the 1-year license was less expensive than the hard copy. She used the information in this article to inform her decision not to recommend the e-book and believed that by doing so, she would avoid introducing additional complications to students' reading processes due to textbook format: "So I know based on this, I will suggest that students do not use e-textbooks... you are better to buy the hard copy and make notes to yourself" (Grace, Interview Two, November 7, 2013).

**Instructional preparation.** During the second interview, Grace discussed her initial thoughts about ways to address reading comprehension for this study. Given her

multifaceted approach to helping students with academic reading, her idea was to expand a pre-existing element of her instructional program. During the first group session, participants had discussed the importance of introducing first-year students to critical reading and abstract thinking in order to demonstrate the breadth of critical analysis in academic discourse and to aide students in improving their discipline-specific reading comprehension. During the second interview, Grace reported that she had been “thinking about bringing that into anthropology” but was still unsure about how to introduce critical reading and abstract thinking effectively (Grace, Interview Two, November 7, 2013). Specifically, she wished to introduce students to multiple perspectives in anthropology as a way to deepen their comprehension of specific topics: “The overall [purpose] would be to allow students to see this variability...and digest the fact that there are often conflicting views in the literature” (Grace, Interview Two, November 7, 2013). Grace believed that through exposure to a variety of perspectives on a topic, students would learn to work with different ideas and “incorporate [them] into their writing... or thinking. Students could become better critical thinkers and then... [transfer] that to their writing because they comprehend the content better” (Grace, Interview Two, November 7, 2013).

Grace provided an example of a debate in anthropology from which she could draw various perspectives: “Within paleo-anthropology there will be one fossil and there would be many different interpretations of it... different perspectives on what this fossil should be named or where it should be placed. Careers are based on these interpretations” (Grace, Interview Two, November 7, 2013). Although she recognized the value of students learning to appreciate various academic viewpoints, Grace also expressed

concern about confusing first-year students who would not be majoring in anthropology with multiple perspectives on discipline-related topics. Instead, she explained, she preferred to lay a foundation of basic anthropological understanding in first-year courses and later complicate that foundation in upper-year courses by presenting differing academic viewpoints of specific topics for comparison and analysis. Because she was teaching sociocultural anthropology, Grace ultimately selected materials for the first-year course that presented cultural perspectives that might differ from her students' perspectives. Grace believed that by working with these journal articles, students would become aware of cross-cultural viewpoints but would not become confused by deeply theoretical explanations of various topical interpretations.

Previously, Grace provided students with journal articles to read during a session intended to introduce them to APA documentation. As part of that session, she reviewed the processes of reading academic articles and correctly documenting information borrowed from them. After this instruction, Grace asked students to formulate a paragraph in which they quoted and paraphrased passages from the articles, using appropriate citation. During the following class, students discussed their paragraphs with one another in small groups, identifying errors in comprehension of the articles and in the use of APA, and were then invited to rewrite the paragraphs. The following week, students submitted the paragraphs for Grace's perusal and returned the articles to her. For this study, rather than using articles related to anthropology in general, Grace decided to use three articles presenting different sociocultural perspectives on the same topic inherent to the course content. Students would retain the articles after the introduction to APA and use them as part of a discussion of the subject later in the semester. The articles

would also form a portion of the testable material for the final exam. Grace perceived this instructional change as a small modification that she could evaluate for its effect since it would represent the only adjustment in a course she had taught several times before. Her only concern was that students might not read the articles or submit the paragraphs the week after the introduction.

During the first group session, others had discussed the idea of assigning marks for completion of reading and writing exercises. Grace later commented that she would consider changing her practice and assign marks for the APA exercise as an incentive for her students:

Incorporating maybe 5%, so they have to bring in their direct quote or paraphrase.

I introduce the idea in class, everyone...does a little bit of peer helping, and then everyone has to hand in the next week... something to show me that they have done it. (Grace, Interview Two, November 7, 2013)

In preparation for our pre-instructional dialogue, Grace planned to select the articles for the APA exercise and to consider further the idea of assigning marks for completion of the paragraph. She did not feel that she needed support for her instructional planning.

After our initial discussion about how Grace might address reading comprehension for this study, she opened our pre-instructional dialogue with a description of the modification she had made to the session introducing journal articles and APA documentation. Within the context of “sociocultural and linguistic anthropology,” she chose “tattooing within the subject of art” (Grace, Pre-Instructional Dialogue, January 23, 2014) as the focus for the three articles. Art would be one of the subjects discussed later in the semester, and Grace believed that the articles would



provide a “cross-cultural perspective on tattooing” that would allow students to broaden their perspectives of a contemporary social practice. Grace believed that students would benefit from learning about tattooing as art and would find the articles accessible:

Tattooing is an interesting topic which anthropologists have studied for some time; there is a long history [associated with] tattooing and humans and representations of identity and so on. So there were a lot of things to come out of it, not just art itself, but the embodiment of art. The topic is a bit catchier for students, I think, than something that is broad. (Grace, Pre-Instructional Dialogue, January 23, 2014)

Students would be provided with printed copies of the articles and as part of the introduction to the APA exercise (paraphrasing, quoting, and citing short passages), a brief discussion of the topic of tattooing would take place. After the introductory session, students would be asked to keep the articles for more in-depth discussion later in the semester. During that discussion, tattooing would be presented within the context of a case study. First, Grace would introduce the topic in her lecture, referring to parts of the chapter on the anthropology of art associated with tattooing. Students would then watch a video on tattooing and answer questions about it. Additionally, the three articles on tattooing provided earlier in the semester would be discussed within the broader context of art.

A second adjustment that Grace made to her instructional plan was to use the three articles as testable material on the final exam. Students would be asked to describe one case study that they had discussed during the course with tattooing included in the list of four choices. Students who selected tattooing would be asked to describe details of

the case study and its relation to the subject of art. Specifically, they would be asked to incorporate details from the three articles on tattooing. When asked about how she would assess students' comprehension and application of the article content, Grace said she would be looking for detail in students' answers that were particular to the articles and different from information provided in the textbook. Specifically, she would look for evidence of the "cross-cultural perspective on tattooing" not included in the textbook (Grace, Pre-Instructional Dialogue, January 23, 2014).

As she considered the syllabus for the winter version of the course, Grace had decided not to incorporate marks for completion of the paragraph on tattooing following the introduction to APA. During her pre-instructional dialogue, she outlined the grading she might have provided, had she had the time to modify the syllabus: "If I hadn't been so busy this semester, I would have included 5% for the actual writing of the paragraph" (Grace, Pre-Instructional Dialogue, January 23, 2014). A portion of this mark would have been applied to the initial version of the paragraph and after the small group discussions of citation errors, another portion of the mark would have been applied to the revision of the paragraphs, "forcing [students] to go back into the articles and/or the documentation aspect" of the assignment (Grace, Pre-Instructional Dialogue, January 23, 2014).

**Instructional outcomes.** Grace was unable to attend the scheduled second group session; consequently, she could not contribute a report on her use of the three articles to the other participants and receive their feedback. During the final interview, however, she reported that the introduction to journal articles and APA session had proceeded as planned. Students were provided with the three articles relevant to tattooing and were asked to retain them for the semester. Students scanned the articles quickly, and then

Grace briefly introduced the topic and alluded to the discussion of art that would occur in a class later in the semester. Grace then asked for upper-year student volunteers with experience using APA to demonstrate correct citation of passages from the articles. She believed that reading some of the article content aloud, in addition to discussing how to use “documentation for validation of points” in academic writing, would encourage first-year students to read the articles thoroughly and to gain understanding of the importance of reading comprehension for application of the content (Grace, Interview Three, May 7, 2014). Following the introduction to APA, students were asked to write a paragraph on tattooing, including quotes and paraphrases from all three articles, properly cited with a references page. During the following class, students were asked to share their paragraphs with others in small groups and to discuss errors in citation.

After the introductory class, several students did not return the following week with completed paragraphs and thus could not participate in the peer review. Grace concluded that “perhaps making things worth marks might be helpful” (Grace, Interview Three, May 7, 2014). “I hate that – why can’t people just do it? But not everyone is motivated the same way. [Students ask,] ‘Is this for marks? Do we hand this in for marks?’” (Grace, Interview Three, May 7, 2014). Grace indicated that she would include a grade for submission of the paragraphs in the future and identified this change “adding value within marking” as the only adjustment she would make to this exercise.

Later in the semester, Grace incorporated the three articles in her lecture on art. One of the articles provided a discussion of the representational meanings and cultural symbolism of tattoos. This discussion was contextualized by an explanation of the current tendency for many people to select First Nations cultural symbols for their tattoos, often

without fully understanding the meaning of the symbolism (Schwarz, 2006). Schwarz viewed this behaviour as indicative of a current trend in North America toward seeking ways of recapturing a simpler lifestyle strongly connected with nature. As part of the lecture, Grace asked students how many of them had tattoos. Grace and class members discussed their own tattoos and their representational meanings. Some of the students then linked this discussion with the idea of symbolic representation and First Nations that was explored in the Schwarz article. Grace viewed this application of course material as demonstrating comprehension of the articles and students' ability to contextualize the content:

As I have used the tattoo as part of class discussion before, it was interesting to see the comparison with the comprehension of the material on tattoos in prior years and this year following the change in the exercise. The discussion of the tattoo representation was deeper this time around... as a result of the change in the exercise. (Grace, personal communication, May 21, 2014)

During the lecture, Grace informed students that tattooing would be included as one of the case study choices for a paragraph response on the final exam. As part of the final exam, students were asked to choose one case study from four options and to write a paragraph discussing it. Grace reported positive results from those who chose tattooing: "They had the material from all three articles and linked tattooing to the broader theme of art from the chapter in the textbook" (Grace, Interview Three, May 7, 2014). When asked why she thought that students described the tattooing case study successfully, Grace stated that she believed students' comprehension had been enhanced through repeated exposure to the articles:

Because we utilized the content [of the articles] this time, it became a much richer experience. I think that by incorporating articles that are on a topic in the class and [utilizing] them in three different ways [in the contexts of documentation, class lecture, and exam responses], students are able to comprehend the content better. (Grace, Interview Three, May 7, 2014)

### **Study Reflections**

Halfway through the study, I asked Grace to reflect on her experiences as a participant, specifically in relation to the first group session. She noted an apparent difference between her focus on preparing first-year students with skills for their future careers and the other participants' focus on preparing students "more within their own disciplines" (Grace, Interview Two, November 7, 2013). The other participants' disciplines (history and English) seemed "more foreign" to Grace, and she believed that the other participants shared more in common with each other than with her and her approach to anthropology. For example, both of the other participants assigned their students greater amounts of weekly reading, a factor Grace identified as discipline-specific.

In her current position as a sessional instructor, Grace reported finding little opportunity for networking with faculty and exchanging ideas about teaching. As she preferred discussions about content and pedagogy over discussions related to working conditions and other day-to-day topics, she enjoyed the focus of the group session: "The discussion was really good in the group. The way you presented [the information on comprehension] was good. I enjoyed that. And then the articles you sent subsequently were really good" (Grace, Interview Two, November 7, 2013).

At the end of the study, Grace reported feeling comfortable with the way that she addressed reading comprehension and characterized her instructional outcomes as “stronger than what I’ve done in the past” (Grace, Interview Three, May 7, 2014). She was surprised by the amount of detail and the strength of students’ responses to the question on art and tattooing in the final exam: “I think that shows the strength of doing that scaffolding” throughout the semester (Grace, Interview Three, May 7, 2014). Grace planned to continue to have students review sets of articles across lectures throughout a semester. The only change she planned to make was to assign a small percentage of the final grade for completion of the paragraph on the articles in the APA exercise. Grace wondered whether assigning marks for this activity would result in more students choosing to demonstrate their knowledge of tattooing on the final exam as well as increased completion of the assignment.

Grace: I would attach probably an actual percentage of the final grade to [the paragraph] – a small amount – and then see whether I had an even stronger number in the final exam picking that particular topic.

Cynthia: Because they had already written the paragraph.

Grace: Yes. They had it in their heads, and we talked about it a couple of times.

(Interview Three, May 7, 2014)

When asked whether or not her beliefs about reading had changed during the research study, Grace replied, “Maybe a little.” Upon reflection, Grace identified that it was the presence of the third- and fourth-year students in her first-year course who inspired her to emphasize integration of the articles with the textbook material and the media, to synthesize their comprehension of the topic of tattooing. “I wouldn’t have done

that so much before. It's not really that it's first year, it's more [about] understanding the cohort" (Grace, Interview Three, May 7, 2014). In this case, the attempt to engage upper-year students proved beneficial to first-year students as well and helped Grace to expand her approach to reading comprehension in the course.

When asked to reflect on her participation during both semesters of the research study, Grace cited three components as being most influential. First, she mentioned the group session as a highlight, reiterating the benefits of discussing instructional experiences with her colleagues: "It was really interesting interacting with the other faculty members to find out what it is they are doing. As... professors, we don't get a lot of that type of networking" (Grace, Interview Three, May 7, 2014). Grace thought it would be helpful to have an opportunity to continue to exchange ideas with colleagues, preferably through an online platform. Second, Grace found the opportunity to discuss instructional ideas and entertain pedagogical suggestions during the individual interviews and the pre-instructional dialogue especially useful during the study. Finally, Grace believed that she benefited from being provided with literature related to comprehension instruction and online reading, commenting that this literature was unfamiliar and that she likely would not have encountered it otherwise. Grace summarized her response to participation in the study: "It was good. It's been interesting and a learning experience" (Grace, Interview Three, May 7, 2014).

### **Summary**

Grace believed that reading actively in order to construct knowledge was essential to students' success in their academic and professional lives. She believed that first-year anthropology students needed to take responsibility for their reading comprehension and

offered assistance through scaffolded supports focused on skills such as understanding academic journal articles. Grace's comprehension instruction incorporated introducing three articles early in the course and then drawing on their content across the semester, a practice that she believed strengthened students' understanding of course material. In terms of educational development, she valued the opportunities for group and individual interaction and viewed the initiative as an interesting learning experience. Grace intended to continue her approach to scaffolded instruction in future courses.

### **Hope**

This narrative describes Hope's experiences with prior reading and teaching in social work, where she presents herself as a strategic reader and as a professor who encourages second-year students to engage in deep learning. The narrative also describes Hope's design and implementation of comprehension instruction, where she focuses on vocabulary acquisition. The narrative concludes with Hope's reflection on her participation in the study, where she describes the educational development initiative as enlightening and useful.

### **Reading and Teaching in Social Work**

Hope described herself as a "fast," "strategic" reader who loved to read. She read broadly across discipline-specific material which she then shared with her students in an attempt to relate theories of social work with its practice:

I am reading about theory. I am reading about practice. And I am reading about research in both text and journals. I typically try to ... provide a sort of meta-perspective that's theoretical. We talk about how that connects to the practice that we happen to be discussing that week and then sometimes we include some pieces



of research that support... or are supported by one theoretical perspective or another. So the whole idea is to connect for them theory with practice. (Hope, Interview One, September 24, 2013)

Hope attributed changes in her reading throughout her career to the evolution of her discipline and her commitment to lifelong learning. She spoke about the complexities of the literature associated with a discipline that “sits on the sort of marriage or the seam” of psychology and sociology (Hope, Interview One, September 24, 2013) and cited changes in the literature of social work as the discipline had evolved: she had moved from reading “micro, very social work-specific” material in the 1970s to reading broadly across disciplines today in order to help her students understand the realities of social work.

Social work has evolved and become more complex over time and incorporated the changes we have seen in in sociology and psychology and anthropology, and of course, the world has become smaller in terms of access to information about other cultures and the diversity in our own country. All of that gets incorporated into our social work literature. (Hope, Interview Two, December 3, 2013)

Working on a Ph.D. taught Hope about the need to “consume large amounts of material in short periods of time” (Hope, Interview One, September 24, 2013). Hope believed that developing this ability had made her a more strategic and critical reader, qualities that she attempted to assist her students to develop as well.

When asked about her perception of second-year students and their reading, Hope commented on an “ideological divide” between the present generation of students and their professors in terms of consumption and understanding of academic material.

I think [undergraduates] don't engage with the process readily. They are more about the product [of education], not the process, whereas for many of us when we [went] to college or university, it was a little more about the process. We were encouraged to consume things, be thoughtful about them, interact with people around us, and become critical thinkers. More recent generations aren't afforded that opportunity... [They feel pressured to] get a job, be successful, and brand themselves. (Hope, Interview One, September 24, 2013)

Hope drew connections between the pressure to attend university and students' emotional states, citing stress as a significant factor in students' success:

Sometimes you hear about student anxiety and depression at the university level... [and students are characterized as] privileged, hand-held, sheltered people, but I don't think so. I think, first of all, there are not jobs for them and it terrifies them. Secondly, we've commodified education to the point where it's costing them an enormous amount of money so they are taking out what is equivalent to a mortgage with no guarantee of a way to pay it at the end. And it is absolutely terrifying them. I know from the literature that I consume around stress and the impact it has on the brain, that that is impacting their capacity to do well in school. (Hope, Interview Two, December 3, 2013)

Hope was aware that students struggled with the reading assigned in her courses and attributed their challenges in part to the fact that students often rushed through their academic studies and, therefore, could not benefit fully from their learning experiences.

Many of them work full time, or they are single parents, or they work a couple of part-time jobs: they are trying to get really quickly through a full-time degree, and

they are carrying five sections at a time as a consequence so they can get it over with quickly because they need employment. And that makes the educational experience kind of a superficial one for them. They are just getting by. (Hope, Interview One, September 24, 2013)

Hope further characterized students majoring in social work as more emotionally intuitive than students in other disciplines:

Typically, students come to social work because of their own lived experience, emotion-significant experience. They have been victims of abuse or grown up in an alcoholic family. [These students] tend to have an intuitiveness about them that you may not necessarily see in other disciplines to that extent. (Hope, Interview Two, December 3, 2013)

Hope believed that students' intuitiveness was often associated with fears they experienced in academic environments.

[One of my professors] taught me that emotion begets cognition. So the most important thing that I can do is engage [undergraduates] emotionally, if we are going to have any learning in the classroom. But it's almost like there is something else that has engaged them emotionally first. And it's fear. (Hope, Interview Two, December 3, 2013) Many of them are afraid... of math, of science, of big words, of not understanding. (Second Group Session, February 4, 2014)

Hope believed that second-year students needed assistance with comprehension of academic materials, either through one-to-one support or as part of class instruction on reading critically. She believed that this assistance was necessary because the ways that

students typically consumed information were not necessarily consistent with skills required for comprehension during university studies.

Students, other than what we push them to read, don't necessarily do a lot of reading on their own. They consume things in small sound bites or one page on the internet, or visually in documentaries and videos. So asking them to deconstruct things, to analyze papers critically, to pull something apart and tell me what it really means, is difficult for them. (Hope, Interview One, September 24, 2013)

Specifically, Hope believed that students need to be encouraged to slow down and be more patient when reading, engaging with the readings, understanding theoretical positions, and retaining and applying the knowledge they constructed throughout Hope's courses. Key concepts in the social work courses were carried over throughout the years of study and explored in increasing depth each year. Focused on preparing students to become employed as social workers, Hope worked toward "homogenization" of all the material they learned throughout all the years of their degree study and, consequently, was concerned about students' comprehension in the early years.

Hope's approach to teaching was influenced directly by her perception that current students were significantly influenced and changed by their use of technologies:

Kids coming up now have been exposed to so much more technology [and their] neuroplasticity has been affected at a younger age by the use of computers, iPods, and iPhones, sound bites to consume information. I think it wires their brains differently in terms of education. I think they come into the educational experience with different, more sophisticated technological expectations and I

think they consume information visually in a profound way. (Hope, Interview Two, December 3, 2013)

Hope discussed these observations with her students and, in the process, established a major expectation central to her approach to teaching. She characterized overuse of technology as an inhibitor of critical thinking and challenged students to engage with academic material actively and deeply.

I often will say to them, "You know Marx used to say that religion was the opium of the masses, and technology in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is the opium of the masses, really. It keeps you from those critical issues and prevents you from critical thinking... You can snorkel a long way, but I don't want you snorkeling, I want you deep sea diving." (First Group Session, October 30, 2013)

Hope characterized herself as an unstructured teacher. She often "threw material at students" to see "how they reacted and responded to it" (Hope, Interview One, September 24, 2013). In her second-year courses, she expected students to learn to engage with the material and to analyze theoretical perspectives through epistemological and ontological lenses. She believed it was important for students to understand theories of knowledge and to develop awareness of approaches to "thinking and understanding and seeing" (Hope, Interview One, September 24, 2013). Hope looked for evidence of comprehension and comparison of theoretical perspectives in students' class discussions and writing assignments. She modeled openness to critical thinking by encouraging her students to challenge ideas as she presented them in class and to voice their opinions.

I try to encourage them [by saying], "When you start to critique what I say, that tells me you are learning what you need to learn." ...They will put their hand up

and say, "You know, I take exception to what you said," and I'll always say, "Good! Talk to me about the issue"... They are so used to being told and not asked what they think. So if we want to foster critical thinking, we [first] have to foster thinking. (Hope, Interview Three, May 5, 2014)

Although she was open to flexible class discussion, Hope also recognized the need for organization and clarity in her instructional material and believed that students' comprehension of course content could be aided by clear presentation of expectations and requirements:

I think that sometimes I am not literal enough. So as I am working through a course, I am constantly massaging the syllabus and the outline for assignments as I go for the next September... I am constantly thinking about comprehension that way. (Hope, Interview Two, December 3, 2013)

### **Designing and Implementing Reading Comprehension Instruction**

At the beginning of the study, Hope expressed a desire to learn "strategic methods, approaches, or techniques" that she could "incorporate in [her] repertoire" (Hope, Interview One, September 24, 2013). She wanted to inspire students to become engaged with course materials and to succeed in her courses with a feeling of accomplishment. She believed that through participating in the study she might discover fresh instructional ideas:

Sometimes you find yourself getting stuck in specific ways of teaching materials because you don't get the opportunity to interact with others experientially to look at different ways to do that. I look forward to taking some things away from the experience that I can use. (Hope, Interview One, September 24, 2013)

For the purposes of this study, Hope focused on a second-year core course. The purpose of the course was to teach students the “skill of helping,” including interviewing, as a “prerequisite for a field practicum” (Hope, Interview One, September 24, 2013). During the course, students were asked to read from a theoretical textbook, to complete a series of application activities that Hope had designed, and to read relevant journal articles for each class. Typically, Hope assigned one chapter from the textbook and two articles each week. Additionally, Hope incorporated supplementary literature posted in Blackboard, and “how-to” videos. Hope expected students to complete the assigned readings before attending classes, but found that even partial completion of the readings was sporadic. Hope gauged students’ comprehension by the content of their related emails, the quality of their written work, their engagement with class discussions, or by their level of participation in group work. “If they are not doing the reading, they get consumed in their laptop, they don’t make eye contact with me. Group members will give me feedback in assignments that they didn’t come prepared for discussions, those kinds of things” (Hope, Interview One, September 24, 2013).

Hope stressed the importance of reading comprehension to second-year students, not only in terms of success in their studies, but also in terms of effective functioning in their careers. She explained that social workers may need to read and interpret documents for clients who may be illiterate or unable to understand the jargon of government communications: “Your job is to advocate, know what the words are,... be able to explain how to find out what words mean, and also describe what they mean to somebody who doesn’t get it” (Second Group Session, February 4, 2014). Social workers also need to comprehend material in client files, to prepare background information for meetings

and policy decisions, and to function as members of committees: Hope connected all of these functions to critical consumption of text, “the reports that you are given to comment on” (Second Group Session, February 4, 2014). Despite explaining the importance of reading comprehension to her students, Hope believed that their ability to comprehend was limited by prior reading experiences: “There is a superficiality, kind of an attention deficit that doesn’t allow them to go deeper sometimes into the material. Some of that has to do with reading comprehension, vocabulary” (Hope, Interview One, September 24, 2013).

In an attempt to appeal to students’ preferences for consumption of information, Hope utilized a multiliteracy approach to presenting procedural “how-to” information in the course that included requiring students to read text, watch videos, perform role playing, and interact with simulated clients. She explained the connection between other forms of communication and reading: “I’m inclined to use those more vibrant technological experiences to contextualize the reading” (Hope, Interview Two, December 3, 2013). Hope’s instructional approach to the course also included several components relevant to reading comprehension, including drawing attention to challenging vocabulary words by defining them and using them in context (i.e., during lectures and in PowerPoint presentations). Hope found it challenging to include vocabulary appropriate for all the students in the course since she believed that those who had entered the course with a university degree, for example, possessed a broader vocabulary than those who had entered her course with a college diploma. Although Hope had committed to providing scaffolded instruction across the years of the social work degree program, she found it challenging to construct that scaffolding effectively in light of the diversity in her



classes. “That’s what I mean about scaffolding... it can be a challenge because I have students that are coming from a variety of different routes into the program... finding that middle spot can be difficult” (Hope, Interview One, September 24, 2013).

Another significant challenge Hope faced in teaching her course was the loss of funding to hire individuals to act as clients with whom students could practice their intervention skills. Hope stressed the importance of skilled face-to-face interaction in social work and articulated the need for dedicated resources to support the development of that type of interpersonal communication. Students needed to test their comprehension of course materials in applied situations in order to help them transfer theory to practice. One component of this process was becoming familiar with the language of social work and using terminology appropriately during simulated interviews. Hope and other professors in the program had met with some resistance from students in terms of engagement with discipline-specific vocabulary in these situations as well as others. Not only did students struggle with the meaning of words in their reading, but at least one student requested that professors use more understandable language in their lectures, rather than introduce the class to unfamiliar terminology. Hope believed that students were not engaging with and integrating the literature provided in her course as fully as possible, partly because they did not understand the vocabulary used in the articles.

**The education literature.** After the first group session, Hope was provided with three additional articles relevant to her expressed interests. The first discussed disciplinary differences (Neumann, 2001), the second outlined student reading experiences (Mann, 2000), and the third reported findings on research associated with the brain and reading (Strauss, Goodman, & Paulson, 2009). During the second interview,

Hope commented on the usefulness of receiving articles from the education literature:

“These articles are challenging me to take a look at what I do, how I do it, why I do it that way” (Hope, Interview Two, December 3, 2013).

After the second interview, Hope was provided with two additional articles relevant to assisting students with learning unfamiliar vocabulary in university courses. The first discussed development of deep learning through meaning construction during reading (Roberts & Roberts, 2008), and the second outlined effective reading and learning strategies (Simpson et al., 2004). Hope stated an intention to review the articles as she solidified her instructional plans for the following semester.

**Instructional preparation.** As a way to address reading comprehension in her course, Hope chose to look at ways that the vocabulary of social work could be introduced effectively. She had already begun calling attention to vocabulary words during class discussions in a “word of the week” format but also wanted to design an activity through which students could engage more actively in learning unfamiliar terminology: “an exercise or... something that we could use that would make it fun” (Hope, Pre-Instructional Dialogue, January 13, 2014).

During our pre-instructional dialogue, Hope explained that her desire to focus on vocabulary was motivated in part by students’ reported responses to unfamiliar terminology. In one class, a student reported that he did not understand some of the words in a reading. She asked other students in the class how they dealt with unfamiliar words. Students’ responses included “I ignore them.” “I avoid reading the article.” “I sometimes try to make sense by reading on but sometimes I don’t” (Hope, Pre-

Instructional Dialogue, January 13, 2014). Hope and I discussed her responses to these student approaches:

Cynthia: My first question would be, what do *you* do when you meet an unfamiliar word?

Hope: That's a great question and [students] ask me that. I say to them, "Well, the same things that you might do. I might Google the word. I might deduce from what I am reading what the word possibly means"...

Cynthia: Modelling: Having those discussions is fantastic because then they know that you are seeking to expand your vocabulary as well. I think [you are] extending the academic to the real world.

Hope: And telling them it is life-long learning – we will never know all the words.  
(Pre-Instructional Dialogue, January 13, 2014)

Hope wanted students to become more active in their reading and thought that an in-class exercise might, in an enjoyable way, encourage students to address challenging vocabulary. We discussed several ways in which students might interact with vocabulary during class, following Simpson et al.'s (2004) recommendations for layering vocabulary exposure over time and in various contexts in order to encourage comprehension and integration of terminology in disciplinary discourse. Hope introduced the idea of requiring students to use 2 words from their reading in the weekly application activities. We discussed the importance of students selecting the terms they would incorporate at the same time that Hope controlled the number of words to assure their relevance and assist students to avoid becoming overwhelmed. We discussed the possibility of Hope providing instruction on features of the vocabulary of social work in order to identify

common word components (i.e., prefixes, suffixes) that students might use to infer meaning and we mentioned dictionary games or other contests that might inspire students to engage with vocabulary actively. We discussed the idea of associating words with visual images to aid memory and retention. Hope suggested that vocabulary words and associated images might be posted and discussed in an online forum for ease of access to all students in the class.

Hope expressed a desire to “measure whether we have seen an improvement of vocabulary by the end of the term” (Hope, Pre-Instructional Dialogue, January 13, 2014) and proposed that she might require students to incorporate newly acquired vocabulary in their written portfolios. The portfolios replaced the final exam and were intended to illustrate students’ learning across the 26 weeks of the course. Hope expected students to include comments on their experiences with each of the application activities, and she looked for incorporation of key course concepts gleaned from the assigned articles and class discussions in these comments.

As a result of our discussion during the pre-instructional dialogue, Hope formulated a process during which students would identify unfamiliar vocabulary words in class and then define and discuss those words using images or other means to connect and contextualize them with course material. Hope also planned to ask students to incorporate new words into an application activity or the ensuing group discussion afterward as a way of demonstrating understanding of their correct use. As a method for gauging improvement in students’ vocabulary comprehension, Hope planned to ask students to use the terms discussed in class and related activities in their written

portfolios, which were submitted at the end of semester. Bonus marks would be attached to including, bolding, and defining these words within the portfolios.

**Instructional outcomes.** During the second group session, Hope shared how she introduced the vocabulary activity to her students. In various discussions about assigned reading and subsequent writing assignments, students had explained why they avoided incorporating articles as sources of information in their writing. Hope reported on a typical exchange:

"Why do you just use books in your bibliography when I give you all these articles?" "Sometimes we don't understand the articles." "So, what do you do when you don't understand the articles?" "We just don't use them. We try, but why don't people write more clearly? Why do they have to use great big words?"

(Second Group Session, February 4, 2014)

During the class in which Hope introduced the vocabulary exercise, she explained that when she and her husband completed crossword puzzles, often she was unfamiliar with words that he knew: "I think, I have a Ph.D. and I don't know that word." Hope believed that providing this narrative about her own experience with unfamiliar vocabulary would give students "permission to say, 'yeah, that happens to me a lot' as well" (Second Group Session, February 4, 2014) and might, therefore, invite open discussion about vocabulary. She then asked for at least 2 students to introduce at least 1 unfamiliar word to the class each week for definition and discussion and encouraged students to begin the discussion then: "So how about two words today?" Three students introduced unfamiliar words and the class engaged in discussion of the words' definitions, contexts, and purposes. Hope described the questioning that occurred during that discussion:

We spent a lot of time asking, "What is the word?" "What does the word mean?" "What context was the word used in?" "Why would the author use a great big word instead of something simple?" "How is that [word] relevant to what we talk about in class?" (Second Group Session, February 4, 2014)

Hope then informed students that they would be expected to use or interpret vocabulary introduced during class in their application activity scenarios as well as to incorporate the words in their final written portfolios. Although Hope saw these first steps as a "fairly easy" way to integrate attention to reading comprehension in an existing course, she was uncertain of the outcome in terms of students' utilization of discipline-specific vocabulary: "we'll see how it improves their understanding of the lit. We'll see how it improves their ability to wade into the lit a little more" (Second Group Session, February 4, 2014).

During the third interview, Hope reported that students had continued to bring forward challenging vocabulary during classes for discussion. Some of the words students mentioned as unfamiliar were emancipation, ameliorate, vapid, compendium, paradigmatic, surreptitiously, iconoclast, and diaspora. Hope believed that the discussions of these and other words were beneficial to the students:

The advantage was that it gave them permission to [admit that some vocabulary was challenging]... and as a consequence, when I used words or talked about articles, I would ask them, "Do you know what this means?" And people seemed more comfortable saying no, which is good. (Hope, Interview Three, May 5, 2014)

However, although students engaged with discussions of unfamiliar terminology in class, they did not carry forward that engagement into their application activities or their final portfolios. Additionally, students did not incorporate the amount of literature Hope expected of them in their discussions or their writing. She supplied students with 20–30 articles in addition to their textbook, and Hope reported that “on average they probably wouldn’t have used two to three of those in their portfolio and assignments” when she had expected “at least 10” (Hope, Interview Three, May 5, 2014). Hope acknowledged that students might have used new vocabulary words during discussions following their application activities for which she was not present, but she felt that overall a disconnect had occurred between students’ discussion of the vocabulary in class and their “infusing it or connecting it to the expectations” of the course (Hope, Interview Three, May 5, 2014). We discussed students’ struggles to “comprehensively pull material together” and related it to the reading comprehension strategy of synthesis that seemed to be lacking in second-year students’ abilities.

Cynthia: If we are not seeing even some of the more basic strategies [i.e., paraphrasing and summarizing] being used effectively, then maybe it stands to reason that we will not see synthesis because it requires a combination of a number of strategies.

Hope: I think some of the recent research is telling us that... technology is actually reshaping the neurobiology of our brain. And as a consequence, we are losing patience. We snorkel, we don’t deep-sea dive, and to really synthesize, you have to deep-sea dive... I am starting to realize that there’s a resistance around

reading that we need to explore. What is the resistance about? Is it vocabulary only? What is it? (Hope, Interview Three, May 5, 2014)

In addition to students' resistance to reading, Hope attributed their "underperformance" in her course to her not expressing her expectations clearly and not associating marks in the course syllabus for engaging with unfamiliar vocabulary. Her belief that unfamiliar vocabulary was a key deterrent to reading challenging academic material had been confirmed and she planned to address vocabulary earlier in future courses.

[This experience] made me realize that [unfamiliarity with vocabulary] is a key component in why students don't use the lit as much. And it is also something I am going to now embed in the syllabus. So right from the very first paper, I am going to talk to them about utilizing vocabulary. (Hope, Interview Three, May 5, 2014)

### **Study Reflections**

At various points throughout the study, Hope contextualized her responses to questions or comments about teaching with perceptions of the current status of university education, thus demonstrating her ongoing reflection on this topic. For example, during the first group session, the participants discussed students' reliance on technology and ways that this reliance influenced their instructional approaches. Hope spoke about a general societal suppression of critical thinking and its importance to academic work:

I think there's a hidden agenda: [we are creating] worker bees who can use the technology and just do as they are told. You don't need to be trained to be a specific thing, you need to be trained to think critically. You can be taught to do



all kinds of jobs but comprehension, critical thinking... those are the important things that you learn in university in humanities and social sciences. (First Group Session, October 30, 2013)

During the second group session, Hope expressed concerns over reductions in funding for universities as part of a pervasive political agenda designed to obstruct and silence critical thinking in higher education:

What I'm finding is that institutes promote mono-cultures instead of being seats of learning that encourage controversy and debate about the topics of the day that no one else in society wants to talk about... and that worries me because that [talk] contributes to engagement. It contributes to comprehension. It contributes to critical thinking. (Second Group Session, February 4, 2014)

Halfway through the study, I asked Hope to reflect on her experiences as a participant. She expressed appreciation for the input she had received from her colleagues, the first interview, and the provided articles, stating that the information had helped her to reexamine ways that she "scaffolded the learning process" (Hope, Interview Two, December 3, 2013). When asked whether she was aware of changes in her thinking about second-year students' reading as a result of participation in the study, Hope cited increased awareness of several issues associated with reading:

I get concerned that [reading] may become an outmoded way of consumption of knowledge. I am finding I am thinking a lot more about vocabulary. I am thinking a lot more about connecting it to another kind of visual experience. I am thinking a lot more about comprehension... developmentally [about the relation between age and consumption of material]. When you are teaching a first or second-year

course, you've got that breadth of capacity for comprehension. (Hope, Interview Two, December 3, 2013)

Hope reported feeling very comfortable with the idea of addressing reading comprehension through vocabulary instruction in her course, partly because focusing on the language of social work had been integral to her clinical work for so many years. Working with diverse populations from various professions (i.e., paramedics and auto workers) had taught Hope to move “back and forth between different kinds of language... I love it” (Hope, Interview Three, May 5, 2014). During the study, Hope found that sharing her own need to address challenging vocabulary in her reading seemed to inspire students' willingness to explore unfamiliar terminology themselves. Hope interpreted several occurrences of students opening up as indicators of success:

The fact that they got comfortable with saying "I don't know what this means."

The fact that we had long discussions about some of the words. The fact that they became curious and intrigued about [discipline-specific vocabulary], which was interesting. I would say probably that it boosted their confidence and self-esteem. (Hope, Interview Three, May 5, 2014)

Students realized gradually that it takes time to become comfortable with unfamiliar terminology, and although they did not transfer their engagement with new vocabulary to their written assignments, Hope believed that by being more specific in her directions she might increase transfer in future courses: “What I've learned is that I have to be literal. I have to describe assignments, I have to build assignments around deep learning. I have to describe the assignments with lots of specifics” (Hope, Interview Three, May 5, 2014). In addition to embedding more formal utilization of discipline-

specific vocabulary within her instructional planning for the following year's course, Hope planned to consider assigning marks for introducing vocabulary in visual or other contexts and possibly creating an online environment in which students could share vocabulary with each other. Hope also planned to initiate discussion with other professors about scaffolding vocabulary application and synthesis of literature across the 4 years of the social work degree program.

When asked to provide an insight she had gained during the study, Hope raised concerns about "the future of education," particularly in light of the current trend toward online instruction. Specifically, Hope cited concern about some of the effects of online instruction on students' comprehension of academic materials and discourse.

So much is going to be distance and online and individual. You do a lot more reading when you are not in a lecture and you are not in a classroom sharing things with each other... How do we get them to read? [Reading online is] a one-way kind of interaction... a different experience. I think the other thing that is important about comprehension is the stories that people tell and the facial expressions and the tone. (Hope, Interview Three, May 5, 2014)

When asked whether or not her beliefs about providing comprehension instruction had changed during the research study, Hope cited her interaction with other participants as influential: "Sometimes, just someone else's imagination or approach, you know, gets you thinking, 'I could do this or I could do that'" (Hope, Interview Three, May 5, 2014). Hope also mentioned that the articles provided had broadened her awareness of her own reading comprehension and of comprehension-related issues. Hope planned to refer to the articles as she designed future assignments and suggested that other faculty members

might benefit from a newsletter outlining ideas from the literature about addressing reading comprehension in discipline-specific courses. As a final reflection on her participation in the study, Hope explained that the vocabulary activity she designed was a “concrete articulation” of the goals she had expressed at the beginning of the study, to find ways to help students engage with the course material and to succeed. “You know, it’s made something very literal for me out of that kind of abstract goal. And I think moving forward I am going to use it” (Hope, Interview Three, May 5, 2014).

### **Summary**

Hope believed that reading broadly was an essential component of relating theory to practice in social work. She believed that students needed to engage with course readings in order to apply their understanding across the years of the social work program, and stressed the importance of deep comprehension in her second-year course. Hope’s comprehension instruction focused on vocabulary acquisition, an area of concern that she associated with students’ synthesis of course concepts. In terms of educational development, she valued interaction with colleagues and viewed the initiative as an opportunity to concretize her goal of helping students engage with course materials. Hope planned to expand discussion of vocabulary acquisition across her department.

### **Julie**

This narrative describes Julie’s experiences with prior reading and teaching in English studies, where she presents herself as a critical reader and as a professor who encourages first-year students to think, read, and write critically. The narrative also describes Julie’s design and implementation of comprehension instruction, where she focuses on connections between reading strategies and writing assignments. The narrative

concludes with Julie's reflection on her participation in the study, where she describes the educational development initiative as challenging and positive.

### **Reading and Teaching in English Studies: First-Year**

Julie characterized herself as “a voracious reader... I always have some book, usually two or three on the go. I read primarily, or initially, for pleasure, whether that's a novel or... a critical review of something” (Julie, Interview One, October 3, 2013). Julie read deliberately and extensively in literary journals and sought out critics' content area-distinct publications in order to inform her teaching. As a method of selecting material pertinent to her interests, she perused citations, read the introduction and conclusion, and reviewed the end notes. If she chose to read the text more thoroughly, she then annotated and took notes. Julie cited time as a challenge associated with this type of disciplinary reading because of the “need to read fairly closely in order to make those decisions” and the tendency for searches to become multilayered and web-like (Julie, Interview One, October 3, 2013). Julie attributed changes in her reading approach over time to experience and maturity:

I think as an undergraduate you tend to read whatever comes your way and consider [it] much less critically.... Since it's published you think it is an absolute authority and the word on that particular subject or work. Now I am a much, much more critical reader. (Julie, Interview One, October 3, 2013)

Julie stressed the interactivity of “critical thinking, reading, and writing” in her courses and viewed first-year teaching as an opportunity to introduce students to the conventions of university study. Julie believed that she needed to provide first-year students with more guidance than upper-year students in “applying themselves

academically to either reading or writing” (Julie, Interview One, October 3, 2013).

Specifically, she believed it was important to provide students with step-by-step instructions for assignments and to provide them with written exemplars of completed assignments. Students were to refer to these exemplars as Julie modeled analysis and critique.

In the past, Julie had emphasized writing as the foundational skill essential to university study but had adjusted this belief as she learned about the importance of reading as a critical part of the writing process:

Mostly I have been focusing on directing [students’] writing, but this year, after starting to teach the academic reading and writing course, I realize that their reading is really the first step for them to comprehend anything about how to express themselves in writing. (Julie, Interview One, October 3, 2013)

Julie believed that many first-year students struggled to sustain concentration while reading. She attributed that struggle in part to their processing small segments of information on the Internet that often incorporated hyperlinks, thus fragmenting their attention. Although students were able to identify main ideas in paragraphs, Julie observed that “they tend to lose the overall purpose and argument” when reading longer passages or articles (Julie, Interview One, October 3, 2013). She recalled an example where after reading an article and discussing connections between national identity and sport, a student focused on a single quotation from a historical figure named Spears who had promoted lacrosse in Canada. Rather than understanding the context in which the quotation was employed, the student reported that the article was about “this Spears

person and the process of developing the Lacrosse Association and League” (Julie, Interview One, October 3, 2013).

Observing that first-year students often are skilled at reading narrative but seem to lack active reading skills, Julie emphasized critical reading in her first-year courses, usually in preparation for writing argumentatively. Julie’s approach to critical reading incorporated tenets of the literary theory of close reading in which readers analyze details of text in order to formulate an interpretation (Eagleton, 2006). Julie explained, “It’s not the case of seeing more *in* a work, it’s a case of seeing more *of* a work” (Julie, Interview One, October 3, 2013). Her instructional approach included “looking at ideas, looking at cultural issues, looking at the... structural workings of the piece as a whole rather than seeing it as a piece of real life or a document of someone’s story” (Julie, Interview One, October 3, 2013). Julie believed that students could learn to become more critical in their reading and writing, moving from focusing solely on “characters and characterization” toward appreciating authors’ intentions and “connecting them with other elements of the work such as setting” and theme (Julie, Interview One, October 3, 2013). Julie encouraged students to analyze arguments written in prose by questioning the supporting evidence: “Is that legitimate? Is that valid? What other kinds of evidence may be used to [present a counter-argument]? What are the gaps in the argument – what’s missing?” (Julie, Interview One, October 3, 2013)

Julie cited unfamiliar vocabulary as a major challenge for first-year students and felt that “they are just overwhelmed with basic vocabulary of academic work” (Julie, Interview One, October 3, 2013). Although acknowledging that one goal of the first year of university is to help students develop breadth and depth of reading, Julie also believed

that the literacy level of students entering first year is “surprisingly low.” She cited words like exclusionary, demonize, intimation, and propriety as typical vocabulary that was unfamiliar to most first-year students, differentiating between “students who are 19” and mature students who tend to be “much better readers” (First Group Session, October 10, 2013): “Regardless of when they last went to any postsecondary, or any educational course, [mature students’] literacy level is much higher through life experiences... I don’t know why people under the age of 30 have such trouble” (Julie, Interview One, October 3, 2013). Julie associated struggles with vocabulary and concentration with first-year students’ overall resistance to reading. “They complain about the amount of reading they have to do, not just in my course but [in] all the other courses that they are doing” (First Group Session, October 10, 2013).

Julie described students’ resistance to reading as fear and contextualized it within a broader sense of intimidation often experienced by first-year students. She recalled speaking with students who, frightened by conventions of university study, had reached the conclusion prematurely that they should withdraw from classes because of their lack of comprehension, “not understanding that there is a whole process to [reading] and techniques of overcoming [the fear] that include tools..., resources” (Julie, Interview Two, November 28, 2013). Julie believed it was her responsibility to “accommodate” and address students’ fear and “help them to find strategies to deal with difficult vocabulary” (Julie, Interview Two, November 28, 2013).

As an approach for assisting students with difficult vocabulary, Julie often asked them to work in small groups during class and take responsibility for attempting to comprehend an assigned text. Each group was asked to deliver a short presentation on a



reading that began with students' "personal responses to the article." Julie believed that students felt less fear when working with a group and gained confidence in "putting ideas out there." As a result of working in groups, they became "much more committed to understanding specifically what a text is saying or doing" (Julie, Interview Two, November 28, 2013).

Julie believed that first-year students would benefit most from one-to-one assistance with reading comprehension, but also acknowledged that she could not provide that type of instruction for every student in her courses. Julie doubted the effectiveness of stand-alone courses in reading, partly because they could be perceived as remedial and, therefore, students might not elect to take them. She also commented that students were unlikely to complete such courses if they were not offered for credit. She believed that the learning centres on campus that offered individualized tutoring could offer an appropriate venue for providing students with reading support in addition to the writing support already in place.

### **Designing and Implementing Reading Comprehension Instruction**

When asked about her motivation and goals for participation in this study, Julie expressed interest in collaborating with other professors. She especially was interested in discovering the types of reading assignments used in different disciplines and the types of challenges other professors encountered relevant to students' reading comprehension. "Also, I am interested in any techniques that would, first of all, assess to what extent [students] are comprehending the readings and then secondly, address issues as a result of not comprehending or understanding" (Julie, Interview One, October 3, 2013). For the purposes of the study, Julie focused on the academic reading and writing course, an

elective predominantly taken by first- and second-year students. This was the first year that Julie had taught the course. Her syllabus positioned the course as an environment in which students would gain skills in academic reading and writing, “skills for the increasingly challenging reading and writing you will do as you advance through your degree program and beyond” (Course Syllabus).

At the time of the study, the academic reading and writing course had been converted from two one-semester courses to one full-year course. Consequently, students enrolled in the fall semester would continue in the course until the end of the winter semester. Julie mentioned several benefits of the full-year course format, including continuity of enrolment in the winter semester: “I don’t have to start from square one with students who haven’t had the first part of this” (Julie, Interview Two, November 28, 2013). Julie believed that enrolling in a full-year course would help students to engage with the content and commit to learning: “they have to be committed. They know they are stuck with me and they are stuck with this course, so they might as well dig in and figure out how to do some things” (Julie, Interview Two, November 28, 2013).

For the course, Julie used a reading textbook that included instructional chapters as well as selected academic readings. Typically, she assigned one instructional chapter and one academic reading from the book per week (40-50 pages in total). Julie expected students to follow the weekly schedule, to read the assigned selections twice, and to annotate them and list questions for discussion in class. She also required a short journal response to the readings “so that [students] have a basis for small-group discussion and class discussion as well” (Julie, Interview One, October 3, 2013). The short written responses to the readings were intended to allow students “to practice their reading and

writing skills in a situation that is not pressured... to explore ideas and to engage with the text” (Julie, Interview One, October 3, 2013). Julie gauged students’ reading comprehension by their grasp of the texts’ arguments as well as by their ability to analyze structure of the academic readings. Given the diversity of abilities among her students, Julie was “not really sure how to assess” comprehension more formally in order to understand students’ difficulties and address them in class (Julie, Interview One, October 3, 2013).

I am gathering examples [of students’ writings] and that is the most helpful because then I can identify a specific problem, specific questions around comprehension, and see to what extent that is general throughout the class... I have such a wide range of students and abilities in the class, it is a challenge. (Julie, Interview One, October 3, 2013)

**The education literature.** Of the three articles provided during the first group session, Julie found the Parr and Woloshyn (2013) article most useful because it described reading comprehension strategy instruction in the context of the same academic reading and writing course Julie was teaching. Julie found that the article confirmed the approach to teaching strategies for analysis that she had begun to develop and assured her that she “was going step by step: The paper helped me to feel confident in that process myself. Since I had never taught [strategies] before, it was good to have some reinforcement that it really is a ... process” (Julie, Interview Two, November 28, 2013).

During the first few weeks of the course, Julie had introduced the concepts of monitoring for meaning and analyzing text structure, discussing ways that features

common to academic texts contributed to the structure and meaning of academic arguments:

We looked at the function of abstracts, introductions, theses, topic sentences, subheadings, graphic features, conclusions, and bibliographies and the importance of understanding these elements in order to comprehend the general argument and focus of academic papers in a variety of disciplines. (Julie, Interview Two, November 28, 2013)

Julie used the assigned course readings to identify examples of common textual features and to discuss their functions within an academic argument. She asked students to complete journal responses for several of the readings with the requirement that they discuss these features. Students discussed their responses in class, thus reinforcing the association between the textual features and the “the meanings and arguments of an academic text” (Julie, Interview Two, November 28, 2013).

Once students had become familiar with monitoring for meaning and analyzing text structure, Julie introduced the differences between paraphrasing and summarizing and ways that they might be utilized as reading comprehension strategies. During in-class exercises, she described paraphrasing as restatement of a passage that could be used to construct comprehension of difficult vocabulary and summarizing as representation of ideas in condensed form that could be used to construct comprehension of an argument. Julie assigned small groups a 250-word summary of one of the course readings and a subsequent in-class presentation of the reading in which students presented their summaries.

Julie then introduced the strategy of questioning a text in order to engage in an evaluation of its argument. Once students had identified the thesis and supporting points associated with the argument, they raised questions about the text during class discussions and formulated analyses of the structure and rhetorical strategies (e.g., cause and effect, comparison and contrast). Julie assigned writing tasks that supported these class discussions:

Building on the summary assignment in which students identified the author's central argument (thesis and main supporting points)...we looked at how to break down a text in order to examine its parts and the author's rhetorical strategies. For [the associated writing] assignment, students were required not only to show their understanding and comprehension of the text's meaning (summarizing and paraphrasing) but also to evaluate/critique the text. (Julie, Interview Two, November 28, 2013)

By incorporating these comprehension strategies in her instruction, Julie paralleled some of the approaches used by Parr and Woloshyn (2013) including monitoring for meaning, analyzing text structure, paraphrasing, summarizing, and questioning.

After the first group session, Julie was provided with two additional articles particular to her interests including one article discussing reading in postsecondary contexts (Scholes, 2002) and another discussing undergraduate students' reading practices and comprehension (Pecorari et al., 2012). Julie raised several contradictions she had identified in the Scholes (2002) article. One of these contradictions was theoretical and involved Scholes' claim that students should be taught close reading (focusing on text structure) rather than reader response (focusing on the reader's personal

engagement with the text) in order to develop awareness of the language used in text.

Yet, Scholes also claimed that professors should bring the author of a text to life for the students. Julie agreed that students should learn to focus on the language of text through close reading, but felt that reader response should also be used to help students engage with the author's persona:

[Scholes] wants to encourage professors to make the literature and author live for the reader. So that can't help but be a personal context to some extent. I think the personal context is important and reader response theory is an important approach, particularly with first-year students. (Julie, Interview Two, November 28, 2013)

Julie's employment of both close reading and reader response approaches to reading text were evident in her focus on textual structures during class discussions and her short response assignments to the readings.

Pecorari et al. (2012), discussed findings related to students' underutilization of textbooks despite their understanding of benefits of text engagement. Julie considered these findings "alarming" and discussed the importance of calling attention to the textbook and guiding students to use it as a resource. To facilitate such guidance, she consciously increased the number of references to the textbook in her lectures and designed an open-book exam for her course that included terminology for which students needed to use the index. Julie and I discussed ways in which the article influenced her delivery of the academic reading and writing course:

Julie: Some of my students don't even purchase [the textbook].

Cynthia: I don't think they know why they should and I think [we can] explain that to them. If we take a tremendous amount of time to choose a textbook, there is a reason for that. And it connects very strongly with what we are doing in the class, so we know why it is important. But maybe they just don't; maybe they need that explanation.

Julie: Their attention needs to be drawn to the text. For example, in the final exam for reading and writing I have 10 terms that they have to define. The terms are all out of the text. I say, "So you do know how to use an index, right?"

Cynthia: But it has to be pointed out.

Julie: It does... they will ask me questions like, "What's the difference between a summary and a paraphrase?" [I respond,] "Well, on page 56 of your text..." - that kind of thing.

Cynthia: The active use of resources. (Julie, Interview Two, November 28, 2013)

**Instructional preparation.** During the second interview, Julie mentioned several ways that she might address students' reading comprehension in this study. In the second semester of the course, students would focus exclusively on developing an argumentative research paper. Julie looked forward to being able to instruct students to "call on" the comprehension strategies that they had learned in the first semester (monitoring for meaning, analyzing text structures, paraphrasing, summarizing, and questioning) to prepare the components of this complex writing assignment. One of Julie's ideas was to develop a "debating situation on a set of readings" in order to "stimulate thinking about topics" for the research papers. Working in small groups, students would utilize comprehension strategies to understand and present a stance taken in a text on a specific

topic. As each group discussed a text's stance, a number of different stances on the same topic would be introduced. Through examining the stances, students would consider multiple perspectives and observe how stances are developed and presented in written arguments. Julie had also thought about introducing argument through media, for example, by using TED talks as resources for students to practice analyzing the development of an author's stance. Julie planned to reflect on the ideas we had discussed during this interview over the break between semesters and to formulate her approach to addressing comprehension for the second semester of her course.

Although Julie had planned to schedule a pre-instructional dialogue in January in order to discuss the details of her comprehension instruction during the winter semester, the next time we met was during the second group session in February. There, Julie explained her plans to focus her instruction on the "selection of appropriate reference sources, research process, and final paper." Julie explained that she had assigned the general subject of language for the final research paper and students were free to explore associated topics relevant to their personal and disciplinary interests. For example, one student planned to look at the history of the word nigger while another student planned to look at "the effects of labelling disabilities in children." Another student planned to look at contemporary slang. Julie reiterated her instructions to the students regarding their topic selection: "I [told the students] that they had to find something they were passionate about ... 'don't pick a topic that seems like it would fit with the assignment, really think about what it is that you are interested in'" (Second Group Session, February 28, 2014).

Julie had designed the final two assignments of the course to complement the reading comprehension instructional approach that she implemented during the first



semester. The first assignment, an annotated bibliography, was intended to demonstrate and reinforce students' ability to comprehend and summarize academic arguments as well as to incorporate them into their own argumentative stances. Julie had provided students with an example of an annotated bibliography as part of her introduction to the assignment:

[The example] summarizes the article and then gives an evaluation of how the student will use that article in his or her research project, whereas other examples of annotated bibliographies do not specifically address how the article or source is relevant to the direction of a student's particular research topic. (Second Group Session, February 13, 2014)

Julie reported having worked diligently and patiently with students during the fall semester as they had learned to summarize articles effectively. As students developed their argumentative stances on their topics for the final paper, they would learn to integrate the summaries of articles that they had selected as support for their ideas.

The second assignment, a written synthesis, was intended to demonstrate students' ability to compare and contrast ideas from two articles included in their annotated bibliographies and then to incorporate their syntheses into their research papers.

Just to give [students] some incentive, I said that [they] could then use that material [from the synthesis] to form the focus of the introduction as a kind of literature review... so I am waiting to see how that all works out. (Second Group Session, February 13, 2014)

During the fall semester, Julie had guided discussions about the main argument and key points of several articles, as well as discussions about evaluating strengths and weaknesses of each argument based upon the author's argumentative reasoning. She had contrasted and compared authors' stances on the same topic and encouraged students to analyze these stances. Although she did not model the process of writing a synthesis, Julie expected that students would be able to complete the assignment successfully given the background work on synthesis as a culminating reading comprehension strategy: "Because it comes near to the end of all this instruction on reading and writing, that's the leap they have to be able to [make]" (Second Group Session, February 13, 2014). Julie planned to gauge the success of the synthesis assignment by evaluating the "quality of their writing and the quality of the way they discuss the two works in association with each other" (Second Group Session, February 13, 2014).

**Instructional outcomes.** While instruction during the first semester of the academic reading and writing course was focused on providing students with specific strategies to improve reading comprehension, the two assignments Julie planned for the second semester (the annotated bibliography and synthesis) were intended to demonstrate students' ability to comprehend and synthesize ideas as part of argumentative writing. During the second semester, students had engaged in ongoing small group discussions about their progress conceptualizing their research papers (e.g., developing a research proposal and presentation as well as argumentative and audience plans). Julie assigned the annotated bibliography as another of these conceptual elements. She provided a sample annotated bibliography for students to use as a guide and reported that students were able to write the assignment successfully.

Most of them completed the annotated bibliography well...I think moving from summarizing and that sort of rhetorical analysis and things that we did last term, it was more straightforward for them to do an annotated bibliography and also I think because all of the exercises or assignments this term were directly related to their final research paper, they were motivated to do a good job and to find good sources. (Julie, Interview Three, April 8, 2014)

Julie reported that many students found the synthesis assignment more difficult than the annotated bibliography. The written directions for the assignment asked students to discuss ideas from at least two sources “in relation to each other and to [their] own research project” and later, to integrate that synthesis into the introduction of their paper “to clarify [their] own approach to the topic and to indicate how [their] research and argument fit in to current debates and knowledge about the subject” (Synthesizing [Literature Review] Assignment). When asked about students’ performance on the assignment, Julie indicated that although some students “did a really good job,” others submitted “an expanded version of their annotated bibliography for [their two] sources” (Julie, Interview Three, April 8, 2014). Julie provided extensive written feedback for students so that they could rework their syntheses to use them in their research papers: “I ... marked up sections that they could use for their introduction” (Julie, Interview Three, April 8, 2014). Julie attributed the disappointing results on the synthesis assignment primarily to younger students’ inexperience with “speaking with their own voice.” Younger students particularly, Julie observed, struggled with integrating reading and writing “into their own thought processes” and generating their own ideas. Julie believed that passive attitudes and lack of confidence were inhibitors to this process and she

planned to address issues related to developing voice directly in future sections of the course. Julie wanted to remind students that “writing is not an exercise and not a mimicking of what other people have said... it is [the students’] responsibility to have something to say” (Julie, Interview Three, April 8, 2014).

Before assigning another written synthesis as part of the final exam, Julie discussed problems with the first synthesis assignment in class. She reviewed differences between summarizing text (representing an argument in condensed form) and synthesizing text (comparing and contrasting arguments) and specifically discussed how students might integrate summary within their syntheses. Julie reported that most students performed better on the second synthesis and attributed this improvement to the in-class review as well as to the control she had over the texts to be synthesized: “Since I selected the two articles to be examined (from their textbook), I had more control over the appropriateness of a comparison/contrast discussion and gave them a few hints about what to look for” (Julie, Personal Communication, May 27, 2014).

### **Study Reflections**

Halfway through the study, Julie was asked to reflect on her experiences as a participant, specifically in relation to the first group session. Julie enjoyed learning about other participants’ instructional approaches to history and anthropology, including the types of readings they assigned. Although Julie observed that her approach to reading focused more on close reading and analysis than did the other participants’ (a difference that she believed reflected differences across disciplines), she found it interesting that all participants expressed a shared concern with students’ reading comprehension and concluded that “the problem of comprehension exists. The problem of getting students to

engage with texts and to take the assigned readings seriously - [these are] common problems in first-year students in first-year classes” (Julie, Interview Two, November 28, 2013).

When asked whether she was aware of changes in her thinking about first-year students’ reading, Julie replied, “Oh, absolutely!” As she had expanded her instructional focus to include reading as well as writing, she had become “much more conscious of the problem” of students’ reading comprehension (Julie, Interview Two, November 28, 2013). Acknowledging her prior “prejudice that writing is primary,” Julie now recognized the importance of “being able to comprehend through reading... [instructors] take that for granted because we have been doing that forever” (Julie, Interview Two, November 28, 2013).

Julie reported initially feeling nervous about teaching the academic reading and writing course, specifically providing instruction in reading comprehension, because she had not taught it previously. Once the course was underway, however, she felt “quite comfortable” with comprehension instruction, despite the breadth of the course content:

I tried to break [the reading process] down for myself into little steps and then that was helpful for them too... [Students] appreciated that kind of detail because then they could understand the text in a way they hadn’t seen before. (Julie, Interview Three, April 8, 2014)

Julie contextualized the evidence-based comprehension strategies she taught (monitoring for meaning, analyzing text structure, paraphrasing, summarizing, and questioning) within elements of a reading process required for “looking at academic papers.” Students were encouraged to work through assigned readings using several approaches,

either with pre-reading strategies; with close reading strategies; with techniques for scanning, ways to look at text not just from the beginning to the end like a narrative, which everybody is comfortable doing, but looking at them analytically and looking at them in terms of the design; and rhetorical strategies. (Second Group Session, February 13, 2014)

Julie enjoyed working through challenging articles with students, who responded positively to the instruction and achieved a “real sense of victory” as their comprehension improved: “there were a lot of happy moments in this class” (Julie, Interview Three, April 8, 2014). Julie observed that during a strategy review session held at the end of the first semester, students gained a new appreciation for the interrelatedness of the strategies as well as the purpose of each strategy as part of an overall approach to comprehension.

It was really helpful at the end even for me to see what the process had been and the progress, and for them as well. And then it helped their confidence too. [I could say,] "Now you know how to summarize. You know how to paraphrase. OK, how do you look when you are given an academic article: what are your pre-reading strategies?" They went all through them and were happy... so it was very concrete for them. (Julie, Interview Three, April 8, 2014)

Julie reported that teaching the academic reading and writing course was a “great” experience and believed that completing the course would be beneficial for all students: “Actually, I feel like this should be a required course... for all university students. It really breaks down the process for them... and the feedback I get is that it’s really helpful” (Second Group Session, February 13, 2014).

When asked about her learning during the study, Julie cited specific surprises that increased her awareness of students' reading comprehension. She was surprised by the ways that students "misread" academic writing, missing, for example, the author's intention or tone. She also was surprised that students became "intimidated... by the look of the text. Even when they see the abstract... I didn't realize how fearful they were" (Julie, Interview Three, April 8, 2014). When asked to provide one final insight from the study, Julie commented about the importance of providing students with direct instruction in reading:

how valuable it is for students to have the tools to approach reading an academic text. They really aren't prepared for that when they come to university. And it's not something I've thought about when teaching literature before. I've just expected them to be able to go get critical articles and be able to make their way through [them] and apply [them] to the text. And they don't do that. So the first step is being able to understand what it is they are reading... which I just took for granted. Reading is good in terms of developing their reading comprehension skills but also in terms of modelling ways of writing, ways of thinking, that they can they try to use in their own writing. (Julie, Interview Three, April 8, 2014)

Julie also had begun to provide reading instruction for students in her upper-year literature course, "only it's not so obvious," breaking down critical articles and providing questions to aide their comprehension. She also planned to consider ways that she could address reading comprehension within her first-year literature course, particularly as part of group work.

Julie characterized her participation in the research study as “really positive.” She enjoyed discussing mutual concerns about reading comprehension with other faculty members and enjoyed the opportunity to share pedagogical techniques: “we don’t often talk about our own teaching or our own failures or our own successes” (Julie, Interview Three, April 8, 2014). Julie found that the group sessions “felt supportive.” The articles and the one-to-one sessions helped Julie to consider her engagement with reading comprehension instruction. Specifically, she enjoyed the challenge of expanding her prior instructional focus: “having to reflect on my own teaching of reading and how that applies to my teaching of writing” (Julie, Interview Three, April 8, 2014).

### **Summary**

Julie believed that deliberate integration of reading and writing processes with critical thinking was essential for successful engagement with English studies. She believed that first-year students needed assistance in adjusting to university study, and provided step-by-step instruction and exemplars of writing assignments as part of her approach. Julie’s comprehension instruction included presentation of reading strategies as well as application of those strategies to writing assignments, processes that she viewed as helpful to students. In terms of educational development, she valued the opportunity to expand her instructional focus through interaction with colleagues and viewed the initiative as a positive experience. Julie planned to extend comprehension instruction to include first- and second-year students in future courses.

### **Terrance**

This narrative describes Terrance’s experiences with prior reading and teaching in English studies, where he presents himself as an interpretive reader and as a professor who encourages second-year students to develop well-reasoned arguments. The narrative



also describes Terrance's design and implementation of comprehension instruction, where he focuses on questioning as a reading strategy. The narrative concludes with Terrance's reflection on his participation in the study, where he describes the educational development initiative as informative.

### **Reading and Teaching in English Studies: Second-Year**

Terrance described his own approach to reading as primarily "reader response," referring to a literary theory positing that texts are mere words on a page until the reader's interpretations create their meaning. Readers' interpretations are influenced by the methods of interpretation (conscious or not), the reader's personal history, and the particular associations the reader applies to the words used in the text (Rosenblatt, 1994). Terrance noted that as he revisited literary works, his interpretations "changed all the time," and he associated the suitability of reader response theory with his academic career. "In this profession, we get to reread things much more often than I think most people reread" (Terrance, Interview One, September 25, 2013). He characterized approaching literature personally and flexibly through reader response as "congruent" with the way he taught his students. Terrance believed that he had become a more intelligent, "better reader" through experience and that his own development as a reader could provide incentive for his students: "I am happy about that and it gives me hope for the students. I'm not preaching something that I am not practicing" (Terrance, Interview One, September 25, 2013).

Terrance believed that his teaching methods had evolved during his career. For example, he consciously had shifted away from a position of professor as literary authority whose reading of literary works students needed to adopt in order to succeed in

his courses. “I am trying to move away from that model [where] the students are out there floundering with a text and they come to class to get things clarified” (Terrance, Interview One, September 25, 2013). Terrance believed that students could become better readers:

I think students can do it – they can interpret, they can understand... I like to start from there... I do a lot of group work... and students are kind of surprised about that. They say, "Oh, you mean I don't have to do this paper by myself?" I say, "No, talk to people. Work it out, figure it out. That's what you are doing here." (Terrance, Interview One, September 25, 2013)

Terrance conceptualized teaching literature as a meeting of cultures where students' cultures, his own culture, and the culture of an author's literary writing intersected. Many students, he felt, arrived from high school “as formalists,” analyzing the structural elements and narrative techniques apparent in texts rather than focusing on meaning, significance, and context of the ideas within the texts (Eagleton, 2006). Terrance viewed students' apparent commitment to identifying literary elements while reading as a “substitute for meaning” (Terrance, Interview One, September 25, 2013). Trying to encourage students to move beyond simply summarizing content of literary works, Terrance emphasized the development of critical reading and analysis as part of sound argumentation.

Terrance considered poetry as central to the study of literature: “if you can understand and enjoy poetry, you're going to enjoy and be able to handle the other types of literature” (Terrance, Interview One, September 25, 2013). Terrance often contextualized poetry and other literary genres within their historical milieu, using maps,

documents, or word etymologies to bring literary details to life for his students. Despite his attempts to connect literature and history in engaging ways, however, Terrance often found students disinterested. He attributed their apathy to their frequent use of technologies that he believed actually discouraged the development of deep learning. “I always go back to McLuhan, where ‘the medium is the message’ and the message is that knowledge is superficial... it’s all at the touch of a button” (First Group Session, October 30, 2013). Terrance observed that a superficial approach to learning and reading is “corroborated by television programming and advertising” as well as by Internet content (First Group Session, October 30, 2013). He believed that students who engage frequently with the superficiality of content available through current technologies may seek and be satisfied with surface learning. When they are confronted with learning that requires time and deep thought, they may find the associated processes laborious and unattractive.

Terrance contrasted professors’ conceptions of knowledge and memory with current students’ approaches to learning and reading. He believed that differing perspectives informed differences in understanding of reading comprehension:

Students locate knowledge in a different place than we do... we see it as part of our human makeup and we tend to integrate new knowledge with what we already know; it has to fit and we have criteria. That is comprehending. But if you locate knowledge externally, knowledge is something you push buttons to get because you don’t have a memory. You remember practical things, but if you locate knowledge outside your personality, then comprehension becomes a very different thing. (First Group Session, October 30, 2013)

Terrance associated students' external location of knowledge with their difficulties formulating a critical stance. He believed that if students are not connected to knowledge intimately, they struggle with analyzing that knowledge and synthesizing it with prior learning: "I am wondering if somebody's created a generation of people who can't put two and two together" (First Group Session, October 30, 2013).

Terrance associated students' diminishing involvement with books in print with their limited "intimacy" with knowledge. He believed that books in print evoke "privacy" and "you have to be that much more involved" while reading them. Books "don't give you as much" as digital text so that reading a book is "not a one-way street" (Terrance, Interview One, September 25, 2013). Terrance believed that digital text, in contrast, provides a different, more "public" message than a book and does not speak to the reader as much. "It is a very public internet" (Terrance, Interview One, September 25, 2013). Terrance grappled with the extent to which he encouraged or prohibited students' use of technology in his classes, deciding to opt for incorporation of some technology use in discussions of course materials, asking students, for example, to search for meanings of unfamiliar terms on the Internet.

Although Terrance believed that all students shared common struggles during university study, he characterized second-year students in particular as "scatterbrained" and "distracted" and associated these characteristics with several challenges they faced in his course. One of these challenges was lack of prior knowledge about history and unwillingness to acquire the knowledge necessary to enhance comprehension. Terrance found history fascinating and believed that students needed to understand the historical

context of literary works in order to comprehend them fully. He observed, however, that second-year students often resisted learning about history relevant to literature.

I guess it is kind of compartmentalizing things where the students have these preconceptions about ...history and say, "I thought this was a literature course"...

I am busy showing them maps of Denmark and where the Anglos came from and the Saxons, and they are studying their iPods. (Terrance, Interview One, September 25, 2013)

Terrance also observed that second-year students lacked familiarity with “idiom,” the vocabulary used in literary writing; they lacked “general knowledge,” which became particularly apparent during discussions of literary allusions; and they lacked understanding of the grammatical “contexts” associated with sentence structures. As he attempted to help students recognize the importance of paying attention to detail in order to improve comprehension of literary works, Terrance tried to model a fascination “with root words and that sort of thing” and referred often to the Oxford English Dictionary during class discussions (Terrance, Interview One, September 25, 2013). Terrance believed that students monitored their reading comprehension and expressed their comprehension difficulties when they said simply, “I don’t get it.” Opposed to the idea of “spoon feeding,” Terrance cited the importance of students learning that comprehension is an active process: “it has to be. The student has to do it” (First Group Session, October 30, 2013).

### **Designing and Implementing Reading Comprehension Instruction**

When asked about his motivation and goals for participation in this study, Terrance expressed a desire to “figure out a way” to help students with their

comprehension and predicted that he would become “more aware of the students’ reactions” to the reading assignments for the course (Terrance, Interview One, September 25, 2013). For the purposes of the study, Terrance chose to focus on a required course for second-year students majoring in English studies. He focused “pretty heavily” on what he considered “the basics of writing and thinking and reading” as he covered the content of the course. “The content is a vehicle by and large to... introduce them to history to some extent and to genre” (Terrance, Interview One, September 25, 2013). Terrance found it somewhat problematic that upper-year students could enrol in the course because their experience levels differed from second-year students and their presence in the course complicated Terrance’s focus on the basics. In addition, students were able to enrol in the second half of the course without taking the first half, a situation Terrance called “disturbing” for all.

Terrance used an anthology as a textbook for the course “because it has wonderful supporting material” (Terrance, Interview One, September 25, 2013). In prior years he had used representative texts by authors such as Chaucer and had then added several separate supplementary readings, which students had found overwhelming. Using the anthology instead, Terrance could assign primary readings and then a portion of the contextual material within the textbook. Because the second-year course was a survey course, Terrance had struggled with selecting the appropriate number of literary works and chose to include large numbers of works by each author. As part of the course he required students to “read all of Shakespeare’s sonnets, read all of Milton’s, read... Book One of *The Fairie Queen* and we will talk about it... I couldn’t live with myself if I said, ‘OK, read these three Shakespeare sonnets.’ It’s really hard” (Terrance, Interview Two,

December 4, 2013). Even though Terrance assigned a “fair bit” of reading (what he estimated as 2 to 3 hours’ worth per week), students did not complain to him about the volume of reading. He also posted video clips of live readings or short articles on the university’s online instructional platform. Although Terrance and the students knew that some readings would not be discussed in lectures, he still expected them to complete all assigned readings before class and to demonstrate their understanding of the readings in bi-weekly reader response essays. He gauged students’ comprehension of reading assignments through their engagement with the literary works as part of the class discussions and the context of their writing.

**The education literature.** Terrance felt that the three articles provided during the first group session “served as an orientation” to the topic of reading comprehension (Terrance, Interview Two, December 4, 2013). Of the three articles, Terrance responded most strongly to Alexander’s (2005) “coherent” discussion of reading across the lifespan. “I think it is a good idea for us to be aware... that reading develops – it’s not just decoding and then bringing in other skills” (Terrance, Interview Two, December 4). Terrance cited the importance of Alexander’s identification of “deep-processing strategies” and quoted her inclusion of specific strategies: “‘cross-text comparisons, creating an alternative representation’, so paraphrasing, ‘or questioning the source’” (Terrance, Interview Two, December 4, 2013).

Following the first group session, Terrance was provided with several articles including two that were relevant to his expressed interest in students’ reading practices and comprehension. For the purposes of the study, Terrance felt that Scholes’ (2002) commentary on transitioning to university-level reading and Sappington et al.’s (2002)

article on students' reading compliance provided practical ideas for ways to address comprehension in his course. Terrance was also influenced by an article he had located in The Toronto Star (November 15, 2013), entitled *School Exams: Mom and Dad Were Right – Research Proves Cramming for Tests is Bad* (Brown, 2013). Reporting on a lecture by a psychology professor at Kent State University, the article began with this summary: "Students who spread out their studying and make flash cards to test themselves show remarkably better retention, researchers find. Oh, and forget the highlighter." Terrance expressed interest in the idea of students preparing flashcards to study course material individually and using the cards to review material with one another.

**Instructional preparation.** Using the articles provided, Terrance initially generated several ideas for addressing reading comprehension in his course. For example, he wanted to incorporate an introduction to the specific strategies described in the Parr and Woloshyn (2013) article (monitoring for meaning, identifying text structure, questioning, paraphrasing, drawing inferences, summarizing, synthesizing), with particular focus on questioning. Connecting questioning with the suggestion that students use flashcards to study (Brown, 2013), Terrance thought that questions could be printed on one side of flashcards and answers on the other. Terrance wanted students to bring their cards to class, ask the recorded questions, and discuss answers. Another idea was to assign selected students specific strategies to implement as they prepared their readings for class each week. Those students would provide minipresentations to the class on their use of the strategies and the effect that strategy use had on their reading. The minipresentations would inspire presenters to read the assigned material for the week as



well as to use the assigned strategies. As a result of hearing the minipresentations as well as Terrance's feedback, all students hopefully would be inspired to apply the same strategies to course material and to prepare their own minipresentations thoroughly.

As he continued to explore initial ideas in general terms, Terrance stated that the purpose of introducing or reviewing comprehension strategies would be to encourage second-year students to move beyond summary toward analysis of literary works, in other words to use basic comprehension skills to inform more sophisticated critical reading. Terrance thought that he might edit the Parr and Woloshyn (2013) strategy list and combine it with another handout he had designed on analytical thinking. The handout identified elements of critical thought: "purpose of the thinking, question at issue, information, interpretation and inference, concepts, assumptions, implications and consequences, and points of view" (Terrance, Interview Two, December 4, 2013). He believed that integrating the strategies and elements of thought on one handout would provide students with several concrete suggestions for improving their reading comprehension. Terrance also considered creating 6 to 10 flashcards himself. Each card would have a question related to a reading strategy or an element of thought that he believed would help students analyze a literary work.

Initially, Terrance seemed confident that the work with reading strategies and analytical reading would complement the process of writing bi-weekly reader response essays which he had already established with his class: "I don't think it will be too much for them" (Terrance, Interview Two, December 4, 2013). Terrance planned to send me a draft of his plans for the winter semester once he had determined how to integrate the comprehension instruction with his existing course material. He hoped to incorporate all

of the strategies and elements of critical thinking into class discussions across the semester.

I am trying to... think now how to sequence things. I would like it so that in each class we... [go] through the basics of comprehension and then move to some of the more difficult analytical questions so they can see that progression and maybe we will have a chance to do it eight times or so. (Terrance, Interview Two, December 4, 2013)

Terrance hoped to begin comprehension instruction in early January, shortly after the winter semester had begun.

During the pre-instructional dialogue in January, Terrance continued to develop elements of his approach to addressing reading comprehension. In addition to the specific strategies, the elements of critical thinking, and the technique of studying with flashcards, Terrance introduced the questioning process he had already assigned his students for their reader-response essays and explained that he would like to incorporate some of those questions into his emphasis on analysis. For example, in the instructions on writing the reader-response essays, the questions for “actively responding to texts through writing” included these:

- How does the text make me feel?
- What does the text make me think about?
- What does the text make me consider to be valuable or important?
- What literary conventions or historical characteristics do I notice?
- What elements, devices, or techniques created the effects the text had on me?

Terrance and I discussed the processes students might employ while preparing their reading assignments for class and ways that using the strategies and flashcards might prepare them to answer the analysis questions for their bi-weekly essays. Terrance believed that students could ask themselves questions about the readings relevant to the strategies; for example, if students became confused while reading, they could write on a flashcard the question relevant to their areas of misunderstanding. This process would promote students' monitoring skills or their metacognitive processes associated with their comprehending abilities. Exploring their confusion might also help students to answer the first question for analysis in their reader-response essays: How does the text make me feel? Terrance also planned to recall for students the elements of critical thought he had introduced earlier in order to encourage students to focus their analyses.

Terrance planned the sequencing of his initial introduction to comprehension instruction. He would describe the study and introduce use of comprehension strategies as an approach to reading literature. Following his introduction of three strategies (monitoring for meaning, identifying text structure, and questioning), he would provide students with their flashcards and ask them to read and write questions about their reading for the following class. Terrance suspected that students who struggled with the reading would ask basic questions, while students who did not struggle would ask questions relevant to the more complex elements of thought. Students could think about the questions as if they were questions for a quiz and could record answers on the back of their cards. The following class, students would meet in groups, exchange their cards, and discuss the questions with one another. The discussion was intended to help students prepare to analyze the assigned reading for their next reader-response essay. Terrance

also planned to include a metacognitive element in the discussion by asking students about their experiences using the strategies to generate questions about the reading.

During the second group session, Terrance outlined his comprehension project and described students' responses to date. He had given students a quiz on metaphor, a concept that had been discussed thoroughly in class, and then used the quiz questions to introduce the idea of studying by creating questions similar to those on a quiz. For the next class, students were asked to prepare their own study questions relevant to the work of the Romantic poets they had been assigned to read. Terrance reported his pleasure with the quality of the study questions: "they did a pretty good job. They took it seriously" (Second Group Session, February 13, 2014). Terrance selected strong questions (those that were specific and required some analysis to answer) and posted them to the online course site for students to use as a reference:

- Name three sources of inspiration for writers in the early Romantic period.
- Why is the period called Romantic?
- How did Romantic poets characterize imagination?
- How are the poems of Blake, Coleridge, and Wordsworth influenced by Romantic industrial-social conditions? (Second Group Session, February 13, 2014)

Students had been asked to prepare questions for each week of class, but the following week only three students had prepared questions relevant to the reading. Terrance felt that the quality of these questions was lacking because of an emphasis on factual recall rather than analysis. A reader-response essay had also been due in class that day, and Terrance had hoped that recording questions on their cards would help students

delve into the analysis required for their essays. Rather than writing analytical questions, however, students had written their reader-response essays instead, and Terrance was very disappointed with this omission.

Another participant in the group session raised the necessity of incentives for students in the form of grades for completion of assigned activities.

Clement: Are you giving them marks for this?

Terrance: I just didn't say anything about that. I am not, I haven't been.

Clement: That's why they are not [completing the activity]

Terrance: That they won't do it.

Clement: Unless it is specifically marked, they won't. You have to put it into the syllabus. I put it into my marks breakdown formula as well. (Second Group

Session, February 13)

Although Terrance's initial response was that he was "beyond incentives" and that they "had never even occurred" to him, he said he would consider the option of assigning marks for completed questions, or at least provide more explicit explanation of the connections between recording the questions and other course components. Another group participant explained how she assigned completion marks for journal responses in her course and then encouraged students to use those responses as they studied for the final exam. Terrance clarified the purpose of the questions as a study tool that could assist students to gain understanding of the breadth of the survey course as well as to prepare for the final exam. As he considered his initial experience with the students, he observed that he needed to contextualize the question-writing element of the course more strongly:

“I haven’t worked it out enough for these questions” (Second Group Session, February 13, 2014).

During the same group session, when Clement described his comprehension project, he explained that he had given his students a surprise quiz on assigned reading for his history course. He then provided instruction in reading comprehension of history texts for his students and gave them a second comprehension quiz in the following class. Clement outlined his disappointment with the second quiz results as some students earned lower marks than they had on the first quiz before instruction. Terrance identified a similarity between his experience and Clement’s in that they both had provided comprehension instruction, and when initial results were not as positive as they had hoped, they had become discouraged. “I think you and I have something in common here. I think we are trying to rush it... Just hearing you, I can feel that we did have... some success and then just knocked out [became discouraged]” (Second Group Session, February 13, 2014). Clement and Terrance were encouraged to remember that comprehension instruction would require ongoing investment, particularly as many first- and second-year students might not have received reading instruction since elementary school (Alexander, 2005) and, therefore, might need review and reiteration of strategies. When Terrance was asked about steps that he might take next in his class, he mentioned modelling questioning again and asking students to work in small groups to generate analytical questions relevant to their readings. Terrance also acknowledged that assigning bonus marks for question completion might be an effective approach.

**Instructional outcomes.** Despite agreeing that students “need some kind of concrete incentive,” Terrance was unable to allocate marks for question completion into

his course so late in the year. He continued to ask students for the questions they had recorded in response to their readings and occasionally mentioned questioning “as a strategy” during his lectures (Terrance, Interview Three, June 14, 2014). However, Terrance cited a perceived disassociation, or complication, between the questions he had asked on the reader-response essay instructions and the study questions students were asked to prepare relevant to the course reading. Students did not seem to grasp the potential of the study questions to help them prepare their analytical reader-response essays as Terrance had initially hoped they would.

So I felt with the complication that they were answering all these questions to respond to, and then to add on top the kinds of questions we were trying to develop to lead them to an analysis rather than just a summary, it was almost too much for them. (Terrance, Interview Three, June 14, 2014)

Responding to his perceptions of students’ needs and limitations, Terrance limited his introduction of reading strategies to the initial three presented during his introductory class (monitoring for meaning, identifying text structure, questioning). Similarly, he continued his emphasis on reader-response essays, rather than developing other types of essay writing as planned. Terrance believed that many of the students in the course did not benefit from the experience of taking the second-year course: “The class was very weak over all” (Terrance, Interview Three, June 14, 2014).

### **Study Reflections**

Halfway through the study, I asked Terrance to reflect on his experiences as a participant. Terrance recalled highlights of the first group session, including the ideas that

“emotion begets cognition” and that with the advent of persistent use of technologies, human learning had changed.

In terms of 21<sup>st</sup> century literacies, the idea of knowledge now is depersonalized and not part of our own experiences. I do think that’s a significant change. I think it could be a really significant barrier in some ways to teaching reading... and to the way we think our students should be reading. (Terrance, Interview Two, December 4, 2013)

Terrance stated that his thinking about reading had become more “foregrounded” and that he now recognized in the educational literature some of his former ways of thinking. Specifically, Terrance recognized his previous tendency to assume “that everybody is reading and reading is generic” (Terrance, Interview Two, December 4, 2013). Terrance believed that his current perceptions of reading were evident in the design of his comprehension project: the fact that he had explained the study to his students and had begun to provide comprehension instruction indicated that it had become important to him to address explicitly the development of critical reading skills. “I think that it is always important to have your subtext, or whatever you want to call it, not hidden from the students so that they know what you are up to, not just being sort of manipulated” (Terrance, Interview Two, December 4, 2013). Rather than assuming and expecting that students would develop improved comprehension as the course progressed, Terrance now felt that he should address comprehension directly with the students.

At the end of the study, Terrance reported feeling very comfortable with including reading comprehension instruction in his course, calling his approach “another angle” to a familiar emphasis in teaching English. However, he also identified the challenge of



balancing the need to provide direct instruction with his pedagogical commitment to involving all students in discussion.

I am there as part of the class in a sense that I am not bringing all the answers and I am not bringing the finalized interpretation. What I am doing is convening a group who all read the same thing and we all talk. Of course, some of the things that I say I have thought about time and time again, so those things are my contribution. But that doesn't mean that the students' contributions aren't as important. (Terrance, Interview Three, June 14, 2014)

Although he avoided lengthy lectures, Terrance provided context for topics of discussion in class and felt that direct instruction on strategy use could be considered part of a contextual background that could enrich discussions of literature.

Initially, Terrance expressed disappointment with the outcome of his instruction on using questioning as a comprehension strategy and attributed the result in part to the positioning of the instruction during the second semester of the course: "I think the way it went where I tried to implement partway through the course, I couldn't do it. I couldn't turn the corners" (Terrance, Interview Three, June 14, 2014). He believed that students did not prepare analytical study questions in part because they were overloaded with work. As the semester progressed and Terrance could see that they were becoming overwhelmed, he decreased the intensity of his comprehension instruction. "And then when [writing the questions] fell by the wayside, I know it was because they felt they had enough to do. And they do... I am not saying they dropped it; I am saying that I did" (Terrance, Interview Three, June 14, 2014).

Despite not seeing the overall instructional outcome he desired, Terrance acknowledged that some students did prepare strong questions that were more analytical than factual, an outcome that he believed demonstrated their comprehension of the assigned reading. Terrance was also surprised by some students' positive responses to using questioning as a study strategy and he "did get a very positive feeling about it actually" (Terrance, Interview Three, June 14, 2014). Reflecting on this result encouraged Terrance to consider how he could incorporate reading comprehension instruction as a foundational concept in his other courses: "I want to integrate what I was doing in this area of comprehension and have that as another stream [of instruction]" (Terrance, Interview Three, June 14, 2014). Although he did not plan to teach the same literature course the following year, Terrance planned to develop an integrated review of comprehension strategies for his upper-year courses. He believed that developing awareness of comprehension strategies would give his students a concrete and positive goal and that students would find improvement in their comprehension encouraging. Particularly in upper-year literature courses, where students' writing was scrutinized carefully and where so much of the feedback was "bad news," Terrance believed that seeing progress in their reading of literature would help students to feel more successful.

Terrance did not perceive that his thinking about second-year students had changed during the study, although his thinking about reading comprehension instruction had changed. Terrance was aware of incorporating more acknowledgement of students' comprehension challenges in his brief lectures and he believed that he had discovered a broader sense of the definition of comprehension.

It changed my approach to what I had to say about the literature. [I was] more oriented towards the difficulty that the students would have reading an old Shakespearean sonnet. What opened up for me is that there's more to reading comprehension than just looking up the meaning of a word. It is being able to paraphrase the meaning... and to appreciate it... so it opened up a lot of dimensions that are really important to studying literature. (Terrance, Interview Three, June 14, 2014)

Terrance felt that he had satisfied his original goal of learning more about comprehension instruction. Specifically, he believed that he acquired greater understanding of ways that students can employ strategies while studying literature. He also appreciated being able to read and reflect on the provided articles, discuss instructional ideas with me and other participants in the study, and then “try them in the class and see what happened” (Terrance, Interview Three, June 14, 2014).

Several times during the final interview, Terrance expressed regret that he had not begun comprehension instruction with his students in the fall rather than the winter term of the academic year: “when I start [my courses], there is enough for the year and so this was kind of like wedging something else in” (Terrance, Interview Three, June 14, 2014). Terrance perceived that the educational development components of the study, intended to provide participants with background information about comprehension instruction, would have been better positioned in the summer months (July or August) rather than in the fall semester.

Terrance believed that some of the components of the study could be translated into ongoing support for university faculty. He believed that there are faculty who “don't

read pedagogical research” but are interested in addressing comprehension in their courses. Individualized educational development could be offered by establishing individual “dialogue hours” to provide “expert teaching assistance” (Terrance, Interview Three, Jun 14, 2014): “When a prof is designing a syllabus, then you could come and go over it with the person and put in your perspective. So it’s not content..., it’s teaching strategies” (Terrance, Interview Three, June 14, 2014). Terrance believed that having the opportunity to discuss pedagogical techniques for specific courses would be much more attractive to faculty than receiving generic information on comprehension strategies, particularly through email which might easily be deleted. He acknowledged, however, that “a lot of professors and for various reasons don’t feel open” to receiving teaching support and, therefore, individuation of assistance would be important (Terrance, Interview Three, June 14, 2014).

### **Summary**

Terrance believed that active interpretation of literary works was essential to effective reading in English studies. He believed that second-year students needed to draw on prior knowledge, including historical and grammatical contexts, in order to engage with readings, and he incorporated discussion of those contexts in his courses. Terrance’s comprehension instruction introduced questioning as a strategy for active reading and studying, a process that he saw as helpful for dealing with the complexities of comprehension. In terms of educational development, he valued the differentiated coaching and viewed the initiative as informative. Terrance planned to continue integration of comprehension instruction in his upper-year courses.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter provided narratives of participants' experiences with the educational development initiative. First, the narratives described participants' backgrounds in terms of disciplinary reading and teaching. Participants characterized their academic reading as strategic and critical, and their approaches to teaching first- and second-year students as more skills-oriented than their approaches to teaching upper-year students. Second, the narratives described design and implementation processes associated with reading comprehension instruction (including response to education literature, instructional preparation, and instructional outcomes). Participants found the provided education literature informative and planned instruction that they believed would assist students to comprehend assigned reading for their courses (i.e., conducting reading workshops, drawing on topic-specific articles across a semester, discussing and promoting utilization of unfamiliar vocabulary, encouraging reading/writing connections, and integrating questioning as a reading and study strategy). All participants felt that their attempts to provide comprehension instruction were successful and they intended to provide similar instruction in future courses, with slight changes (e.g., prioritizing and integrating instruction throughout the academic year and assigning grades for reading activities). Finally, the narratives described participants' reflections on the educational development initiative. While all participants felt that the initiative was worthwhile, they expressed varying preferences for the literature, group sessions, or individual interactions as components or processes they found most useful. While individual narratives provide one method of reporting and interpreting data, comparing data across narratives can also be informative and provide a more synthesized view of participants' experiences with a

study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To that end, an analysis of within-case similarities among the narratives is provided in Chapter Five.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS OF WITHIN-CASE SIMILARITIES**

In order to explore professors' experiences with reading comprehension instruction and educational development, this study focused on participants' beliefs relevant to their teaching and learning. Consistent with tenets of psychological constructivism, beliefs associated with individual as well as social construction of knowledge were explored. Participants' pre-existing beliefs appeared to have been formed through idiosyncratic as well as social meaning making processes that appeared to be integrated rather than distinguishable as separate (Gordon, 2008; Prawat & Floden, 1994). As participants expressed their evolving beliefs, individual experiences, and reflections throughout the study, commonalities, or shared perceptions, became apparent that can be viewed as socially constructed formal knowledge (Mackeracher, 2004; Yilmaz, 2008). This chapter identifies several categories of commonality among participants, including (a) pre-existing beliefs about reading and teaching in their disciplines, (b) experiences with instructional development and implementation, and (c) meaning making processes, all of which appeared to influence participants' learning during the educational development initiative. The themes emergent from these categories are explained and then contextualized in the literature.

### **Participants' Pre-Existing Beliefs about Reading and Teaching in Their Disciplines**

Disciplinary affiliation has been established as influential in professors' thinking, reading, writing, and teaching (Becher & Trowler, 2001; Donald, 2009; Kreber, 2009; Marincovich & Prostko, 2005; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Trowler, 2014). As beliefs act as filters of information and experience (Fives & Buehl, 2012) and are relevant to professors' teaching practices (Kane et al., 2002; Kember, 1997; McAlpine, Weston, Berthiaume, et al., 2006), it seemed important in this study to associate disciplinary

beliefs with beliefs about reading and teaching. This section discusses participants' beliefs about effective academic reading, students' academic reading and comprehension, and teaching first- and second-year students.

### **Effective Academic Reading**

All participants expressed the belief that effective academic reading is active and critical, and they described individual approaches to successful reading consistent with their disciplinary experiences. Pugh et al. (2000) suggested that there is a “Western academic definition of *literate individuals* [original emphasis]” (p. 25), and the participants' discussion of synthesis, organization, interpretation, and application of text ideas was consistent with this Western definition. The participants learned how to read effectively in their disciplines through trial and error during their experiences as students and considered continued reading as essential to enriching their knowledge of their disciplines. Clement, for example, learned that his early approach to undergraduate study, which included avoiding extensive reading, would not benefit his learning as much as reading selected portions of history texts thoroughly, scanning texts for passages relevant to his reading purposes and taking notes on their content, a practice he continued as a professor. As Hope completed a Ph.D., she learned to “consume large amounts of material in short periods of time” (Hope, Interview One, September 24, 2013). As a professor, she continued to pursue extensive reading across the disciplines of sociology, psychology, and anthropology in order to remain current in her field. Pugh et al. cited Fish's (1980) description of informed readers as those who are “guided by awareness of their own prior knowledge and its contribution to the new meanings they construct from texts. Such readers attend not only to what texts say but to what they say to texts” (p. 27).



The participants' commitment to ongoing academic reading demonstrated self-regulation through their reported motivation and control of cognition, emotion, and behaviour (Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2014).

While all participants believed that active and critical reading was central to successful academic study, their approaches to completing extensive reading differed according to their disciplines (Donald, 2002; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). For example, Terrance and Julie described processes of slow, analytical reading associated with the study of literature and critical works (Donald, 2002; Foster, 2003). Alternatively, Clement, Grace, and Hope (reading in history, anthropology, and social work respectively) discussed the importance of efficiency and selectivity when reading (Donald, 2002; Hounsell & Anderson, 2009). Participants' enculturation to their disciplines appeared to affect their reading practices (Becher & Trowler, 2001; Donald, 2009) and influence their beliefs about effective academic reading (Huber & Morreale, 2002).

### **Students' Academic Reading**

Participants believed that students should read actively and critically and expected students to employ processes similar to their own; however, they also identified widespread noncompliance among students with assigned reading. They associated such noncompliance with apathy and fear, emergent in part from the perceived overuse of information and communication technologies (ICT).

Collectively, the participants believed that students needed to read actively and critically in order to succeed in university and in their careers, particularly as this type of reading enables the formation of oral and written argumentation (Jackson, 2009;

MacLellan, 2015; Roberts & Roberts, 2008; Sappington et al., 2002; Svensson et al., 2009). As an instructor of a first-year academic reading and writing course, Julie attempted to provide her students with skills that were foundational to academic study and believed that reading actively and critically was “really the first step for them to comprehend anything about how to express themselves in writing” (Julie, Interview One, October 3, 2013). Grace cited her belief that reading is “really important to whatever you are going to do ultimately” (Grace, Interview One, September 19, 2013) and identified reading critically and locating appropriate materials to support argumentation as important transferable skills. These beliefs about the primacy of reading are consistent with researchers’ findings that reading is “one of the most basic and essential abilities for an educated populace” (Alexander, 2005, p. 414). Specifically in university environments, “reading is the platform from which critical thinking, problem solving, and effective expression are launched” and those who struggle with reading may “face formidable barriers to success, beginning with their postsecondary education” (Pugh et al., 2000, p. 25).

Expressed and implied consistencies between participants’ ways of reading and their expectations of students’ reading processes were evident. For example, Terrance stated that his adherence to reader response theory (Rosenblatt, 1994) was “congruent with what [he liked] to teach the students” and made him feel as if he was “practicing what he was preaching” about developing critical responses to literary works (Terrance, Interview One, September 25, 2013). Hope’s broad and strategic reading of theory, practice, and research informed her efforts to “provide a sort of meta-perspective that’s theoretical” and encourage students to apply diverse readings to their social work practice

(Hope, Interview One, September 24, 2013). There is a consensus among researchers that individuals' beliefs may act as filters for new knowledge, fueling a preference for knowledge that is consistent with existing beliefs (Kane et al., 2002). According to Pajares (1992), early experiences can produce beliefs that are "highly resistant to change" because the beliefs "affect perception and strongly influence the processing of new information" (p. 317). The participants' tendency to expect their students' reading processes to be similar to their own can be viewed as perseverance phenomena, to the extent that participants' beliefs about efficacious reading were established early in their careers and were consistent over time (Douglas, 2000). In this case, participants believed that they had learned how to read successfully in their disciplines and perpetuated that belief through their expectations that students should read similarly.

All participants reported student noncompliance or resistance to completing assigned reading for their courses and attributed this apathy to various student attitudes. For instance, Clement believed that many of his first-year students did not complete assigned readings in history and associated their noncompliance with their being overwhelmed by the idea of reading independently for the purposes of learning. In particular, he believed that when reading "was not worth any direct marks," students perceived it as "a waste of time" and did not complete assignments (Clement, Interview Two, December 13, 2013). Grace also commented on the effects of noncompliance on students' performance: she cited lack of interest as a factor in students' inability to gain comprehension "other than a very superficial sense of what's in [a journal] article" (First Group Session, October 10, 2013).

All participants identified fear as a factor that they believed influenced students' engagement with university studies in general and with reading specifically. For example, Julie described her experiences with first-year students becoming overwhelmed with the rigors of academic work. She noticed how fearful they seemed and how frequently they entertained ideas of their unsuitability for university-level study prior to becoming familiar with reading processes and "techniques of overcoming [the fear]" (Julie, Interview Two, November 28, 2013). Hope also cited extraneous fears associated with overwhelming debt and lack of employment opportunities as common stressors that interfered with students' "capacity to do well in school" (Hope, Interview Two, December 3, 2013). Hope believed that rushing through their education prohibited students from engaging with reading thoughtfully and thoroughly.

The participants' observations are congruent with widespread concern among professors that reading noncompliance is common among university students and that such apathy negatively affects their comprehension of course material, class participation, and exam results (Berry et al., 2011; Burchfield & Sappington, 2000; Sappington et al., 2002). The participants' beliefs around causes of noncompliance also are consistent with studies on student reading practices. For example, Lei et al. (2010) cited poor reading comprehension, lack of self-confidence, procrastination, disinterest in research topics and course subject matter, lack of extrinsic motivation, and disbelief that reading is important as factors that influence students' decisions not to complete assigned reading.

All of the participants associated student apathy and resistance to reading with the overuse of ICT, which they believed damaged students' interest and ability to read lengthy and complex works in print. Clement believed that students gravitated toward the

Internet for historical accounts because they tended to be more narrative than argumentative in nature. “[The Internet] streamlines everything for them. I think that speaks volumes about what students want to read and the problems that they are having with comprehension... It is way easier to upload images of the Second World War” than to deal with arguments in “sources from historical abstracts” (First Group Session, October 10, 2013). Grace cited students’ familiarity with reading short passages of text online that provide “a soundbite every 35 seconds” as preventing students from understanding that “it takes longer to read the 44 pages that you have assigned” (First Group Session, October 10, 2013). Julie identified students’ inability to sustain attention while reading academic articles: “they tend to lose the overall purpose and argument” (Julie, Interview One, October 3, 2013). She attributed this inability to students’ frequent processing of small segments of information on the Internet including hyperlinks that she believed encourage rapid movement from one piece of information to another.

Hope characterized technology as “the opium of the masses” that inhibits students’ abilities to engage in critical thinking (First Group Session, October 30, 2013). She cited changes in the neuroplasticity of brains exposed to extensive technology as a factor in students’ consumption of information and expectations of educational experiences. She described students’ experiences in the early years of university study as difficult:

Students are being socialized by the social media that they interact with. They read differently from the way we did when we were younger, if they read at all. They prefer an audio experience and a video experience to having to sit down and read a book. It doesn’t move at the speed that they like. When information is

given to them audio-visually in sound bites, it moves at a speed that... is better for their attention span. The attention span that is required [in order] to sit down and read through an article three or four times and critique it, to deep-sea dive, is very difficult for them. (Second Group Session, February 4, 2014)

Terrance believed that the message associated with technological media is that “knowledge is superficial... it’s all at the touch of a button” (First Group Session, October 30, 2013). He expressed concerns about knowledge that is stored externally from the human brain, postulating its connection with surface learning, reduced comprehension and memory, and the inhibition of abilities to analyze and synthesize ideas effectively.

Professors see [comprehension] as part of our human makeup – knowledge – and we tend to integrate a new knowledge with what we already know; it has to fit and we have criteria... that is comprehending. But if you locate knowledge externally – knowledge is something I push buttons to get because I don’t have a memory – if you locate knowledge outside of your body, outside your personality, then comprehension becomes a very different thing. I can’t make an argument because [this knowledge] is not part of me. (First Group Session, October 30, 2013)

The participants’ concerns about the influence of ICT use on students’ approaches to academic reading are aligned with one side of an ongoing debate about screen reading (Acampora, 2011). Acampora described concerns that ICT use may negatively be affecting readers’ abilities to engage with printed text effectively:

Worries abound that the increasing popularity and use of electronic media of all sorts, including games as well as news and entertainment sources available on the Internet, are ruining the habits of reading required to truly understand a text as

well as wrecking [*sic*] havoc on the attention spans of readers and researchers of all ages. (p. 222)

Additional concerns cite students' familiarity with digital environments but unfamiliarity with information literacy skills and critical thinking skills that can enhance digital literacy (Zhang & Martinovic, 2008). Lack of such skills in digital environments could preclude transfer to print environments and vice versa. While none of the participants suggested that students should not use technology, they seemed concerned about the use of ICT to the extent that they may prevent students from becoming familiar with alternative forms of reading, namely complex discussions and arguments frequently found in academic texts. Researchers such as Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, Castek, and Henry (2013) have argued compellingly that literacy has always been associated with change; the current permutation of change involves adjustment of traditional reading and reading instruction to incorporate processing of information published and located using ICT. Arguments such as Leu et al.'s, however, do not address the participants' specific concerns about how and in what contexts students may learn to comprehend and synthesize the complex argumentation frequently incorporated within texts associated with academic study, particularly if they are lacking critical thinking skills.

### **Students' Reading Comprehension**

Initially, participants appeared to share the assumption that students enter university possessing comprehension skills adequate for university study. They evaluated comprehension in terms of class participation and cohesive writing relevant to assigned readings, and identified students' challenges with unfamiliar vocabulary as a common factor affecting their comprehension.

Participants believed that first- and second-year students possess the basic comprehension skills necessary to complete assigned reading upon entrance to university. Grace believed that effort was the key predictor of comprehension: students who “did the work in an organized manner” tended to “get it” and comprehend the reading. She believed that there was another group of students who “were not going to comprehend because they were not trying to. They just couldn’t be bothered” (Grace, Interview One, September 19, 2013). Clement believed that many professors take students’ ability to comprehend text for granted; although they suspect that students may not complete assigned reading, they still say, “Here’s the textbook, go and read it” each week, assuming that students are capable of completing reading if they choose (Clement, Interview Two, December 13, 2013). Greene (2009) found that professors, most of whom hold sophisticated beliefs about knowledge, expect their students to hold similar beliefs and associate those beliefs with success in university studies. Specifically, the participants’ beliefs about students’ basic comprehension skills were consistent with Andrews et al.’s (1996) observation that it is common for professors to assume that students entering postsecondary institutions already possess abilities to learn successfully in an academic environment.

All participants gauged students’ comprehension of assigned reading through their levels of engagement in class discussions and the cohesiveness of their written assignments. For instance, Julie looked for frequent participation during small group presentations of articles and fully-developed weekly written responses to assigned reading. Hope believed that students became “consumed in their laptop” and avoided making eye contact with her when they did not understand the assigned reading.



Additionally, they did not contribute to group assignments (Hope, Interview One, September 24, 2013). As comprehension itself is invisible, professors assigned indicators of textual understanding that are consistent with general expectations and benefits of engagement with university-level reading including participating in class discussions, understanding lectures, and learning course content (Maclellan, 2015; Sappington et al., 2002; Svensson et al., 2009).

All participants identified students' apparent unfamiliarity with disciplinary vocabulary as a major challenge to their comprehension and critical reading. Hope identified vocabulary acquisition as an area of interest because her second- and upper-year students appeared to struggle with learning the jargon of social work. She observed that students did not seem to read beyond assigned sections of the text or to use a dictionary and believed that was "what was stymieing them in terms of vocabulary development" (Hope, Interview Two, December 3, 2013). Terrance identified vocabulary as a major challenge for his second-year students and "hammered away" at helping them through modelling use of the Oxford English Dictionary in class (Terrance, Interview One, September 25, 2013). The participants' identification of familiarity with disciplinary vocabulary as an essential component of successful comprehension is consistent with researchers' findings, as is their belief that university students often struggle with acquisition of such vocabulary (Francis & Simpson, 2009; Simpson & Randall, 2000).

### **Teaching First- and Second-Year Students**

Collectively, participants believed that first- and second-year students needed assistance with adjustment to university study, including assistance in becoming familiar

with expectations around assigned reading. Participants offered assistance that appeared to be directed toward guiding students to read in ways similar to their own.

All participants believed that first- or second-year students needed assistance to engage with course material and to become familiar with conventions of academic study. Grace, for example, believed that while she introduced students to the discipline of anthropology, she also needed to introduce students to “writing a basic essay [and learning] how to study and digest material” (Grace, Interview One, September 19, 2013). She viewed these as foundational skills that students could develop further as they progressed through their university studies and beyond. She incorporated scaffolded instruction in order to encourage students to take “responsibility as young adults in a university setting” (Grace, Interview One, September 19, 2013). Clement deliberately attempted to “deconstruct” first-year students’ prior conceptions of education that he believed were inconsistent with effective university study and attempted to “reconstruct” more appropriate conceptions, in part by providing students with direct instruction on writing effective essays in his history courses (Clement, Interview One, September 13, 2013).

All participants believed that it was important to incorporate a variety of instructional tools to assist students with learning course concepts presented in their assigned readings. Acknowledging that students prefer fast-paced delivery of messages, for example, Grace had utilized video formats, an online lab simulating an archeology dig, and a website designed to help users understand “their own racial biases” as teaching aides (First Group Session, October 10, 2013). Hope also utilized videos as well as role-playing and in-class simulations of client scenarios to help students learn interactive

techniques and to “contextualize the reading” (Hope, interview Two, December 3, 2013). While participants utilized such instructional aides in order to connect with some of their students’ learning preferences, they maintained the belief that reading extensive discussions was essential to successful academic study. This recognition of the necessity for active and critical reading is consistent with general expectations for university-level reading (Maclellan, 2015; Roberts & Roberts, 2008) and also with reports of challenges that first- and second-year students may face as they transition to the rigors of university (Donald, 2002; Francis & Simpson, 2009; Halpern, 1998; Pawan & Honeyford, 2009).

The participants appeared to have formed their beliefs about teaching first- and second-year students in ways that are consistent with the literature. Pratt (1992) explained that “conceptions of teaching represent normative beliefs about what ought to be and causal beliefs about means-ends. Each is impregnated with values and assumptions which inform actions and guide judgments and decisions regarding effectiveness” (p. 217). Hativa, Barak, and Simhi (2001) suggested that “university professors... gain beliefs and knowledge about good pedagogy through trial-and-error in their work, reflection on student feedback, and by using self-evaluation” (p. 700). While all participants believed that first- and second-year students would benefit from focused instruction, their approaches to providing this instruction differed. Entwistle and Walker (2000) attributed such differences to

preferences which stem from the individual teaching style adopted (Entwistle, 1988). Those preferences... affect the choices made among the wide variety of possible pedagogical methods and types of assignment, and again may lead to

strong convictions about what is considered "appropriate." (Entwistle & Walker, 2000, p. 344)

There appeared to be a connection between participants' personal experiences with reading and their instructional approaches. In some cases, this connection was direct and expressed. Clement, for example, stated that he did not receive instruction on effective study methods in his first years of university. He believed that if someone had explained expectations clearly, "a lightbulb would have gone on and it would have really helped" (Clement, Interview One, September 13, 2013). Consequently, he incorporated direct instruction on how to write essays in his first-year history courses. Grace was not introduced to journal articles until late in her undergraduate studies. She came to believe that understanding the significance of scholarly material is essential to effective academic study. Consequently, she utilized "journal articles as part of exercises in the scaffolding towards understanding," emphasizing their importance and integrating them in her first-year course content. Clement and Grace's desires to compensate for perceived shortcomings in their undergraduate experiences through their instructional approaches seems consistent with Ballantyne, Bain, and Packer's (1999) finding that

the most commonly reported influence on the development of teaching practice is the academic's own personal experience. In many cases, this involves a reaction against the traditional methods that they experienced as students and a desire to improve on these techniques in their own teaching. (p. 249)

Kreber (2013) positioned experience-based knowledge about teaching as equally reliable and valuable as traditional research-based knowledge, particularly when experience-

based knowledge is informed by “reasoned arguments” constituting evidence and justified through “critical reflection and critical self-reflection on assumptions” (p. 154).

While two participants identified a direct connection between their prior experiences with academic reading and their instructional approaches, other participants appeared to view their students’ needs in terms of their own reading practices and integrate opportunities for students to develop reading processes similar to their own more indirectly. Julie, for example, selected academic sources carefully and thoroughly which, she acknowledged, could be “a little difficult because you need to read fairly closely in order to make those decisions” (Julie, Interview One, October 3, 2013). In turn, she expected her students to employ a detailed process of close reading (reading twice, annotating, writing responses) in order to become familiar with the content and significance of literary works. The observation that participants associated students’ needs and subsequent teaching methods with their own methods of successful academic reading seems consistent with Burroughs-Lange’s (1996) findings on the influence of beliefs on instructional approaches. Burroughs-Lange found that university lecturers’ beliefs about their students’ needs, and “the particular demands of acquiring learning specific to their knowledge domain, provide the context within which their teaching endeavours are formulated” (p. 29). It appeared that participants’ beliefs were influenced by schooling, life experiences, disciplinary and pedagogical knowledge, as well as consideration of students (Eley, 2006; Fives & Buehl, 2012; Hativa et al., 2001; Hoy et al., 2012; Stark, 2000) and that these beliefs influenced connections among participants’ academic reading experiences, their expectations of students’ reading, and their

instructional approaches (Ballantyne et al., 1999; Burroughs-Lange, 1996; Douglas, 2000; Kane et al., 2002; Kreber, 2013; Pajares, 1992).

### **Experiences with Instructional Development and Implementation**

Participants had little experience with education literature, yet were receptive to the articles provided for them. Although they gleaned information from the literature, their development and implementation of reading comprehension instruction appeared to be influenced strongly by their craft knowledge, specifically their beliefs about students, their personal experiences with academic reading, and their prior instructional approaches (Hoy et al., 2012; Van Driel et al., 1997). This section discusses participants' responses to the education research provided, their development of reading comprehension instruction, connections between comprehension instruction and prior instructional approaches, and intentions for continuing comprehension instruction.

### **Responses to Education Research**

All participants expressed their unfamiliarity with the literature on reading in general and with the literature on postsecondary reading specifically. According to Adams (2009), professors' unfamiliarity with education literature is not unusual as "a large body of literature about cognitive development, pedagogy, and effective teaching has been relatively unaccessed by many university teachers" (p. 4). Participants appeared open to being introduced to the literature on postsecondary reading but did not express a desire to search for it themselves. Grace, for instance, cited her interest in differences between the effectiveness of screen versus print reading and students' apparent preferences for screen reading, but she had "never actually looked up the literature" to seek information on the topic (Grace, Interview One, September 19, 2013). Hope

believed that reading education research was beneficial: “[the articles] are challenging me to take a look at what I do, how I do it, why I do it that way” (Hope, Interview Two, December 3, 2013) and was appreciative that articles were provided as part of the study: “Participating in this project and having somebody feeding me this material is very useful” (Hope, Interview Two, December 3, 2013).

Participants believed that the three articles presented during the first group session provided a useful introduction to concepts associated with reading comprehension instruction. Specifically, Grace cited Alexander’s (2005) theory that reading processes can be developed several times throughout individuals’ lifespans and associated the concept of acclimation with first-year students in her anthropology course. The article affirmed her belief that it “is important in first year... to begin to lay down those foundations... [of] how to do research and find material for validation for any argument later on in any profession” (Grace, Interview Two, November 7, 2013). Terrance responded to Parr and Woloshyn’s (2013) description of reading comprehension strategies and identified several strategies that he addressed in his second-year courses implicitly, including “identifying text structure... I am trying to teach them about... genre and forms” (Terrance, Interview Two, December 4, 2013).

Participants also responded positively to the articles selected specifically for their disciplinary interests. For instance, Clement found the article by Hynd, Holschuh, and Hubbard (2004) “particularly fascinating” and planned to adapt ideas contained in the article for use in his courses: “I thought the Tonkin Gulf incident and that kind of information that Hynd provides is quite a good way of looking at it and maybe crafting my second-year level work” (Clement, Interview Two, December 13, 2013). Julie was

influenced by Pecorari et al.'s (2012) article describing students' reading attitudes and practices. Because of her reliance on her reading and writing textbook to provide detailed explanations of academic conventions, she found "the idea that students actually don't consult their textbooks... kind of alarming" (Julie, Interview Two, November 28, 2013). She planned to institute an open book exam as a way of demonstrating the importance of using course textbooks as well as to refer to the text more frequently and specifically during her lectures.

### **Development of Reading Comprehension Instruction**

Participants enacted their planning for comprehension instruction in ways consistent with their expressed beliefs about teaching first- and second-year students, their beliefs about academic reading, and their prior instructional approaches. Consistent with their beliefs that first- and second-year students require assistance in adapting to the rigors of university-level study, two participants had deliberately provided students with suggestions for approaching first- or second-year reading assignments prior to the study. Both appeared to view their participation in the study as an opportunity to refine or enrich such existing instructional elements. Grace focused on selecting digestible and relevant textbooks and introduced students to unfamiliar vocabulary during class. She introduced students to research studies and encouraged them to paraphrase and question content as well as to maintain cumulative reviews of course material. After teaching for 20 years, Grace found "trying out different strategies... exciting" (Grace, Interview Two, November 7, 2013). Hope encouraged her students to read deeply and critically and attempted to provide learning opportunities that included class discussions of vocabulary as well as small group discussions, activities, and assignments to encourage



comprehension of assigned reading. She consciously sought out “strategic methods, approaches, or techniques” to incorporate in “her repertoire” in an attempt to “bridge the divide” between students’ surface consumption of materials and deeper, more critical academic methods of reading (Hope, Interview One, September 24, 2013).

Participants’ instructional decisions during this study appeared to mirror the combined influences of their individual experiences and beliefs regarding academic reading (both as students and as professors) as well as their prior instructional approaches. Clement expressed a desire to save students the time and difficulty he had experienced in his first year. To that end, he designed a miniworkshop on reading textbooks, research, and seminar materials, similar to the existing essay-writing workshop that he had designed previously. As part of his attempt to encourage students to explore reader response theory, Terrance had incorporated historical contextualization as well as discussion of vocabulary and critical thinking in his second-year course. He introduced additional layers of instructional material and methods of discussion as he attempted to introduce questioning as a reading comprehension strategy.

### **Comprehension Instruction and Prior Instructional Approaches**

All participants expressed comfort with their chosen foci for addressing reading comprehension in their courses, an outcome they perceived as emergent from the close association of their comprehension instructional methods with their prior instructional approaches. For instance, Clement knew most of the students in the second term of his course and “had quite a good rapport with the class.” He had facilitated “workshops for other things” and believed that presenting workshops on reading comprehension of course materials “was just sort of another aspect of that learning experience” (Clement,

Interview Three, April 11, 2014). Hope was “very comfortable” attempting to bridge the gap between students’ use of language and the vocabulary of social work. She had worked with diverse groups of students who utilized various types of personal and professional language for years and believed that “moving between those worlds” of students and social work had always been comfortable for her (Hope, Interview Three, May 5, 2014). Participants’ engagement with content reflection provided initial solutions for comprehension instruction that were consistent with their existing approaches to teaching first- and second-year students as well as with their prior teaching experiences. Later reflection on their comprehension instructional processes confirmed their beliefs that their prior approaches and teaching experiences had provided relevant and appropriate knowledge upon which to base their comprehension instruction. Oleson and Hora (2014) found that a variety of factors influence professors’ craft knowledge and instructional approaches, including influences “from their personal lives” as well as “experiences as a student, as a teacher, [and] as a researcher,” factors that should be considered significant in educational development initiatives (pp. 30-31).

### **Continuing Comprehension Instruction**

All participants expressed an intention to continue to address reading comprehension in future discipline-specific courses, consistent with their original beliefs that such interventions could be worthwhile. For example, as a result of her participation in the study, Julie felt that her belief about students’ struggles with reading had been confirmed and intensified. Having become “more aware of the problems with reading,” she planned to “revamp some [elements of her] Introduction to Literature class” (Julie, Interview Three, April 8, 2014). She believed that students “don’t even realize when they

are reading [short stories] how carefully constructed those stories are and how difficult it is to write” (Julie, Interview Three, April 8, 2014). Julie believed that employing reading comprehension strategies would assist students in developing a heightened appreciation for literary structure. During his participation in the study, Terrance recognized the importance of students’ awareness of reading strategies. He believed that reviewing strategies in his upper-year literature courses would provide students with a “feeling of success” and also provide a foundation upon which he could build the importance of taking “a much more analytical approach to the reading” (Terrance, Interview Three, June 14, 2014). The participants’ motivations for continued comprehension instruction are consistent with research findings describing the usefulness and relevance of such instruction within university courses (Bailey, 2013; Chanock et al., 2012; Holschuh & Aultman, 2009; Mulcahy-Ernt & Caverly, 2009; Nel et al., 2004; Taraban et al., 2000; Waters, 2003).

Over all, there appeared to be connections among participants’ beliefs about academic reading, their beliefs about teaching first- and second-year students (including beliefs about reading and comprehension), their general instructional approaches, and their development of reading comprehension instruction. Pajares (1992) identified several evidence-based assumptions concerning teacher beliefs, among them the assertion that “beliefs are instrumental in defining tasks and selecting the cognitive tools with which to interpret, plan, and make decisions regarding such tasks; hence, they play a critical role in defining behavior and organizing knowledge and information” (p. 325). Citing research by Start et al. (1989), Kagan (1992) confirmed that, like elementary and secondary school teachers, university faculty identified “their own beliefs and experiences concerning their

respective fields” as the “strongest influence” on the way they construct their courses (p. 75). This is consistent with recent research on the importance of disciplinary mores to professors’ thinking in which standards of excellence (Fitzmaurice, 2010), delineation of ways of understanding the world and constructing knowledge (Harpham, 2015), and development of various forms of academic dialogue (Poole, 2009) were found to influence professors’ beliefs about teaching and learning. The apparent connections among participants’ reading experiences, beliefs about students, instructional approaches, and planning for reading comprehension instruction are also consistent with Leatham’s (2006) sensible system framework of beliefs in which he posits that professors build complex rafts of beliefs that support their instructional approaches and accommodate a variety of tacit, expressed, and unarticulated beliefs. It was apparent that participants’ beliefs appeared to influence instructional thinking, planning, and decision-making processes (McAlpine, Weston, Berthiaume, et al., 2006) that also were influenced by life experiences, schooling, disciplinary and pedagogical knowledge (Hoy et al., 2012), as well as student considerations (Eley, 2006; Fives & Buehl, 2012; Hoy et al., 2012; Stark, 2000). The complexities of these interconnections aligned with McAlpine, Weston, Berthiaume, et al.’s (2006) description of the complex movement among thinking, action, and reflection on beliefs that may be operational within instructional decision making.

### **Meaning Making Processes**

Participants in this study acknowledged several processes that appeared to contribute to their construction of knowledge, including reflection on student response to their instruction and the importance of group and individual interactions during the initiative. This section discusses commonalities among participants’ engagement with

reflection, group discussions, and differentiated coaching. Additionally, participants' perceptions of their learning and changes in espoused beliefs are discussed.

### **Reflection**

Participants acted as problem solvers during their instructional planning, specifically as they selected areas of focus and attempted to integrate comprehension instruction into their existing course content (McAlpine, Weston, Timmermans, et al., 2006). As they planned and executed their comprehension instruction, participants were asked to reflect upon each phase of the initiative. Initially, participants engaged in content reflection, in which they identified the problem of providing comprehension instruction and considered the prior knowledge and experiences they possessed in order to solve it. Process reflection involved utilizing the education literature and participants' teaching experiences (their own as well as their peers) in order to consider the effectiveness of their chosen solutions. Participants also engaged in premise reflection, in which they questioned the assumptions underlying their perceptions of the problem (comprehension instruction) and their chosen solutions (Kreber, 2006). Participants engaged in premise reflection during and after their instruction and evaluated their initial beliefs in light of their instructional experiences. They interpreted student performance feedback as confirming the various premises upon which they based their comprehension instruction. Fives and Buehl (2012) cited student reaction to instruction as one of the influences on whether or not teachers may implement instruction congruent with their beliefs.

### **Group Discussion**

Most participants valued the opportunity to meet as a group within the context of the study, stating that they enjoyed discussing mutual concerns about reading

comprehension and sharing pedagogical techniques with others. Julie commented that “having a kind of focus group, even though we only met twice, felt supportive” (Julie, Interview Three, April 8, 2014). Specifically, Julie believed that the need to encourage students to engage with text and to take reading seriously was a common instructional challenge in first-year courses. Her belief was confirmed through interaction with other participants during which they voiced similar beliefs. “I really enjoyed listening to other faculty members talking about reading comprehension with regard to their disciplines... and to hear that professors experience that kind of problem with reading comprehension in all disciplines” (Julie, Interview Three, April 8, 2014). During the first group session, Clement commented on Julie’s description of assigned written responses to reading: “I think your idea of responses is very, very clever. Having them write it down. It takes that fear element of speaking in a room away from it” (First Group Session, October 10, 2013). During a later interview, Clement described how he had adapted Julie’s idea by assigning one-page responses to the reading in his second-year history course. He planned to ask students to post their responses to the online learning platform for all students “to see what others had actually written” and to inspire discussion during class seminars (Clement, Interview Two, December 13, 2013). Hope also commented on the value of discussing pedagogical ideas with colleagues:

The interaction with you and everyone else was very important...I wish that on a regular basis that sort of collaborative, community approach was encouraged and supported for faculty because I think it helps a lot. Sometimes just someone else’s imagination or approach gets you thinking. (Hope, Interview Three, May 5, 2014)

All participants cited a lack of opportunity to have such discussions on a day-to-day basis. Palmer (2007) described this isolation as the “privatization” of teaching: “when we walk into our workplace, the classroom, we close the door on our colleagues. When we emerge, we rarely talk about what happened or what needs to happen next, for we have no shared experience to talk about” (p. 147).

Although most participants valued the opportunity to meet with a group, they also raised several reasons that ongoing meetings might not be practical. Even within the structure of the study, scheduling difficulties were significant as participants cited time constraints as barriers to meeting with others. Although Clement valued the group meetings within the context of the study, he did not feel that they were necessary or practical for ongoing educational development. Instead, Clement felt that occasional focused workshops pertinent to topics of interest could be offered to faculty (Clement, Interview Three, April 11, 2014). Terrance also believed that other components of the study held greater value than the group sessions. He suggested that working with professors individually might address scheduling challenges: “There is the possibility of setting up consultation hours individually... so it’s not too helter-skelter because professors will be as random as possible” (Terrance, Interview Three, June 14, 2014). Working with professors to provide a variety of options for interactions within educational development is consistent with the principle that professors should initiate and develop the types of learning they believe will help them to grow (Dee & Daly, 2009; O’Meara et al., 2008).

### **Differentiated Coaching**

Collectively, the participants believed that the differentiated coaching provided during the study was helpful, citing personalization of dialogue and supportive, relevant instructional suggestions as most useful. Coaching has been described as “job-embedded” support designed to address teachers’ needs, and differentiated coaching includes meeting individuals where they are in terms of understanding and working with them in a variety of ways to meet their expressed needs (Grierson & Woloshyn, 2013, p. 404). In this study the coaching provided was largely informal, although intentional, and incorporated into dialogue about comprehension instructional planning and implementation.

When asked which component of the study had been most influential, Julie indicated that “everything worked. I think the one-on-one sessions were probably the most useful” (Julie, Interview Three, April 8, 2014). Because Julie was teaching the academic reading and writing course for the first time, she found it useful to discuss elements of the course, specifically reading comprehension: “You developed the course and have done all kinds of research in reading comprehension so that was really useful to have” (Julie, Interview Three, April 8, 2014). Grace also mentioned that having someone who has done “extensive reading on comprehension” provided a helpful resource: “It’s not something I have ever studied per se” (Grace, Interview Three, May 7, 2014). When asked which component of the study had been most influential, Grace similarly emphasized the one-to-one sessions:

Mostly bouncing ideas off of you. You have made suggestions along the way and some of those have stayed in the back of my mind as I went along one path and then [thought], oh, that tidbit could maybe fit in here or there. And even having



the positive aspect of hearing "Oh well, it's good that you do that." (Grace, Interview Three, May 7, 2014)

Differentiated coaching has been found to be effective in part because it utilizes teachers' strengths and beliefs to assist them with problems in their practices (Kise, 2006). In university contexts, acknowledgement of professors' expertise and autonomy, including their strengths and beliefs, has been found to be an important factor in meeting their individual needs within educational development contexts (Dee & Daly, 2009; Eddy & Mitchell, 2011; O'Meara et al., 2008).

Participants made unsolicited comments about the nature of the approaches utilized during coaching. Collectively, they appreciated observations and suggestions related to their instructional practices and considered them as indicative of respect, openness, and collaboration. Grace, for instance, felt that my not being "adamant or pushy about any ideas" allowed her to explore small changes in her courses (Grace, Interview Three, May 7, 2014). Terrance described the coaching as "teaching" and valued the individual discussions: "I think it's great... you are able to approach us and suggest ideas in a very acceptable way" (Terrance, Interview Three, June 14, 2014). He conceptualized a more permanent role for an instructional coach:

It gives a whole new meaning to the term "teaching assistant." What I can see... is expert teaching assistance so that when a prof is designing a syllabus, or course, then you could go over it with the person and put in your perspective on this particularly. So it's not [specifically] content; it's teaching strategies. (Terrance, Interview Three, June 14, 2014)

The various elements identified by participants as helpful during coaching are consistent with a variety of roles that coaches may assume, including acting as a useful resource, encouraging sage, collegial mentor, and expert (Kise, 2006). Associated with these roles, authentic conversations about teaching and learning within university contexts (voluntary interactions in which meaningful issues are addressed in safe, trusting environments) may contribute to professors' growth and development (Kitchen et al., 2008).

### **Participants' Learning**

As individuals interact with their environments and with one another, and as they reflect, learning may occur as knowledge is constructed (Altun & Büyükduman, 2007; Nie & Lau, 2010; Powell & Kalina, 2009). In the context of exploring professors' beliefs about reading and its instruction, processes of learning became evident as the participants in the study interacted with one another and with me and as they reflected upon their experiences throughout the initiative. Indications of learning were provided as participants voiced their experiences within the study. I was most interested in participants' identification of transformations that were meaningful to them and that they felt would affect their academic biographies, including their teaching, in the future. Maintaining this focus made it possible to retain my commitment to co-construction of knowledge, in which participants provided their own perceptions of their learning, as well as to honour their private awareness of their selves, recognizing that they might have chosen not to share particular reflections or might have been unaware of some learning (Jarvis, 2006). Participants who had not addressed reading comprehension in their courses prior to the study described learning that enriched their knowledge of comprehension and its instruction, specifically in terms of their students' needs.

Participants who had addressed comprehension in their courses described learning that substantiated their knowledge of particular aspects of comprehension instruction.

Julie, Clement, and Terrance had not addressed reading comprehension in their courses prior to the study. Julie presented direct instruction in comprehension strategies to her students during the first semester and had learned about students' need for strategies to help them engage with accurate and critical academic reading. During the second semester, she learned that students might need direct instruction regarding advanced comprehension skills such as synthesizing information from multiple sources, a need she associated with both reading and writing. Clement learned that planning comprehension instruction differed from planning the writing workshop he currently presented and was more complicated and time consuming than he expected. He also learned that teaching reading strategies and assessing students' use of them was not straightforward per se, nor did it necessarily result in immediately measurable outcomes. Terrance learned that academic reading is not a generic activity, but one that requires readers to engage in cognitive processes flexibly. Like Clement, he learned that integration of comprehension instruction needs to be planned thoroughly before implementation and that instruction takes time and repetition, as indications of success may not be obvious and progressive.

Grace and Hope had addressed reading comprehension informally in their courses prior to the study through discussions of research, writing, and vocabulary. Specifically, Grace learned that utilizing relevant materials across course content and providing opportunities for students to utilize the materials in various ways could improve comprehension for these materials. She also learned that assigning grades for each

activity could serve as a motivator for assignment completion that some students find necessary. Hope learned that students demonstrated stronger resistance to academic reading than she expected, and she associated this resistance with students' inability to process unfamiliar vocabulary.

Jarvis's (2006) theory of human learning describes disjunctural, or novel, situations during which individuals transform their experiences into learning by memorizing biographical changes that occur. In unfamiliar situations, individuals may accept and utilize new knowledge that results in thoughtful learning, while in more familiar situations in which less disjuncture occurs, individuals may experience little or no learning (Jarvis, 2006). Disjuncture may contribute to moments of transformation within individuals' biographies (Jarvis, 2006), as learning may occur in places of challenge and growth. In this study, Clement, Julie, and Terrance appeared to experience disjuncture in terms of their unfamiliarity with addressing comprehension instruction with their students. They gained new knowledge, appreciation, and skills (Jarvis, 2006) that they accepted, utilized, and ultimately memorized as thoughtful learning. Grace and Hope appeared to experience less disjuncture in their interactions during the study as they had addressed comprehension in their courses previously. Subsequently, they reported constancy or reconfirmation of instructional approaches, versus adoption of new approaches, and thus their learning appeared less dramatic.

### **Participants' Learning and Beliefs**

Just as participants' beliefs appeared to filter information, frame educational tasks, and guide their actions (Hora, 2014), beliefs also appeared to affect and be affected by participants' learning (Jarvis, 2006). Inferring the specific relationship between beliefs

and learning, however, is a complex and uncertain process. Not only are beliefs often tacit, private, or inaccurately articulated, they are also open to misinterpretation by researchers (Leatham, 2006). Teaching and learning may be influenced by a variety of factors that operate in relationship to beliefs (e.g., personal characteristics, organizational constraints, sociocultural contexts, student perceptions), and thus identifying standalone beliefs and relating them to specific learning within a teaching context may be difficult (Leatham, 2006). For these reasons, I relied on participants' espoused beliefs as language can act as a symbol of beliefs and, therefore, may concretize the abstract content of experience (Jarvis, 2006). It became possible to ask participants to compare their pre-existing beliefs with those at the end of the study and to learn about their perceptions of ways in which their biographies had been rewritten in light of their teaching and learning experiences (Jarvis, 2006). Participants who had not provided comprehension instruction prior to the study described growth in their beliefs that appeared to result in changed frames of reference (Kreber, 2006), while those who had addressed comprehension in their courses previously described intensification of their beliefs.

Clement, Julie, and Terrance described growth in their beliefs in which the importance of comprehension instruction and students' perceptions of reading were foregrounded. Clement expressed a belief, which he described as an epiphany, that there are actions professors can take to counter students' noncompliance with assigned reading as well as to influence positively the ways they read. He extended this belief to state that all professors should read education literature about reading and teaching reading and that comprehension should be addressed in first-year courses as it assists students and provides a sense of hope for professors. Julie expressed change of a fundamental belief in

the primacy of writing to the belief that students need to read effectively in order to express their ideas in writing. She voiced a developing conception that introducing students to academic reading strategies helps them to develop comprehension skills and models ways of writing, both of which are critical to first-year students' success in university. Terrance explained that he originally believed that critical reading was a generic process in which all students were capable of participating readily. As a result of focusing on comprehension, he developed a heightened awareness of students' struggles with reading literature and recognized the need to address directly the development of critical reading skills for improved comprehension.

Grace and Hope described intensification of their prior beliefs about students' reading processes and attitudes. Grace initially believed that students read differently while using ICT than printed material and, after reading Sandberg's (2011) review of the literature on e-reading, ultimately voiced the belief that electronic versions of texts, which may not be read linearly, may introduce unnecessary complications to students' reading experiences. As she perceived benefits of introducing articles relevant to course topics and including their content on the final exam, Grace intensified her belief in scaffolding material across lectures. Hope held a prior belief that students struggled with the vocabulary of social work, but after participating in the study, she articulated an intensified belief that students demonstrate actual resistance to reading (a phenomenon that she believed required further exploration). She also expressed her belief that comprehension instruction needed to be infused across "the breadth of course work at various levels" and that vocabulary acquisition needed to become a focus in social work courses (Hope, Interview Three, May 5, 2014).

Participants' beliefs appeared to grow or intensify in association with the types of learning they experienced. Those who experienced the most disjuncture and thoughtful learning (Jarvis, 2006) appeared also to experience the most significant changes in their beliefs, while those who experienced the least disjuncture appeared to experience intensification, but not significant changes, in their beliefs. This seems consistent with reciprocal associations between beliefs and learning in that beliefs may be affected by learning, and learning may be affected by beliefs (Jarvis, 2006). Over all, participants' beliefs were consistent with the literature describing (a) the complexity of reading comprehension (Dole et al., 2009; Hock & Mellard, 2005; Parris & Block, 2008), (b) students' reading challenges in university environments (Donald, 2002; Francis & Simpson, 2009; Halpern, 1998; Pawan & Honeyford, 2009), (c) the need for integration of comprehension instruction within discipline-specific courses (Holschuh & Aultman, 2009; Mulcahy-Ernt & Caverly, 2009; Wilkinson & Son, 2011), and (d) the influence of beliefs on instructional planning and learning (Ballantyne et al., 1999; Burroughs-Lange, 1996; Douglas, 2000; Fitzmaurice, 2010; Greene, 2009; Harpham, 2015; Jarvis, 2006; Kane et al., 2002; Kreber, 2013; Pajares, 1992; Poole, 2009).

Ultimately, it appeared that encouraging participants to approach comprehension instruction from a personal perspective, foregrounding their beliefs as valuable components of instructional planning (Smyth, 2003), aligned both with Palmer's (2007) perception of the importance of self-identity to teaching and Gordon's (2008) association of the importance of self with constructivist learning, a connection supported by three observations. First, the range of comprehension instructional approaches (e.g., from adjustment of article selection to restructuring of lecture content to address

comprehension concerns) seemed to underscore the personal nature of participants' teaching, particularly as it was associated with strong beliefs (O'Meara et al., 2008). Second, encouraging participants to relate their own reading practices, beliefs about student reading, and their prior instructional approaches to their comprehension instructional planning, along with positive student performance feedback, may have influenced participants' perceptions of success and motivated them to plan to continue comprehension instruction in future courses (O'Meara et al., 2008). Finally, it is possible that reading comprehension instruction was perceived as beneficial, in part, because it provided definitive steps for participants to take beyond identifying and bemoaning first- and second-year students' challenges with academic reading. Developing comprehension instruction that was consistent with participants' existing approaches to teaching provided them with an opportunity to address proactively their concerns about student apathy and noncompliance toward assigned readings (Dee & Daly, 2009) at the same time it provided an opportunity to scrutinize, evaluate, and revise their beliefs (Gordon, 2008).

Encouraging participants to approach comprehension instruction reflectively, while utilizing their craft knowledge, can also be seen as consistent with approaches to process-oriented educational development focused on "individual meaning making" and "a questioning orientation to teaching and learning" (Amundsen & Wilson, 2012, p. 108). In this study, an attempt was made to reach a balance between my perceptions of participants' educational development needs and their professional autonomy by offering support to participants while recognizing their expertise and ability to address issues in their teaching (Dee & Daly, 2009). The support offered was aligned with consideration of



participants' expressed beliefs, which, as Smyth (2003) argued, may be critical to learning and growth in educational development.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter discussed themes emergent from analysis of similarities among the study's participants. Collectively, participants appeared to plan comprehension instruction in ways consistent with their beliefs about academic reading, first- and second-year students, and instructional approaches, a finding consistent with research on the role of beliefs in the complexities of instructional planning. Participants viewed comprehension instruction positively and planned to continue the practice in their courses. Consistent with research on best practices for faculty-focused educational development, participants believed that a variety of formats for interaction and information dissemination were valuable in that they supported meaning making. As participants engaged in reflection throughout the initiative, their instructional experiences and associated learning led them to reconsider their frames of reference and/or to confirm or intensify their initial beliefs about reading and comprehension instruction. While Chapters Four and Five provided description and analysis of participants' experiences and beliefs, Chapter Six suggests possible implications of the study and provides recommendations for further exploration in broader contexts.

## **CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the experiences and beliefs of university professors as they participated in an educational development initiative focused on reading comprehension instruction. Participants in this study appeared to be proficient readers, higher order thinkers, and self-regulated learners interested in their students' reading comprehension. As part of their teaching roles during this initiative, they utilized craft knowledge, education and other disciplinary literature, reflection, and collegial discussions to conceptualize, plan, and implement reading comprehension instruction in their first- and second-year courses. Participants seemingly approached and engaged with the study in manners that were unique and harmonious with their beliefs and prior experiences. They engaged with purposeful learning and reported that their original conceptions of reading and teaching reading were reconsidered, confirmed and/or intensified. Throughout the study, participants provided reflections on the structure and implementation of the educational development initiative. The participants' lived experiences and learning can be contextualized at an intersection with culture (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), in this case, of others who are interested in reading comprehension instruction and educational development. Consistent with the nature of qualitative research, findings related to intersections between personal experience and broader culture are not intended for generalization (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), but rather, elucidation of observations that may provide insight for others. To that end, this chapter includes discussion of implications for theory and practice, recommendations for continuing research, and personal reflection.

### **Implications for Theory**

This section positions participants' beliefs, experiences, and meaning making processes as influences on learning throughout the study (see Figure 2). The importance of self to learning and teaching, and specifically the participants' investment of self during the educational development initiative, are discussed. Complexities of the participants' personal engagement with the study inform the implication that acknowledging and honouring professors' investment of self in the design and facilitation of initiatives may contribute to their learning and perceptions of meaningful educational development.

Figure 2 depicts participants' beliefs, experiences, and meaning making processes as spheres intersecting with one another and with learning. The importance of beliefs to educational development has been established (Smyth, 2003), as have the advantages of process based educational development initiatives (Amundsen & Wilson, 2012). Learning may be placed in the center of beliefs, experiences, and meaning making processes as the focus of initiatives supporting "individual meaning making," and "a questioning orientation to teaching and learning" (Amundsen & Wilson, 2012, p. 108). Relevant to this study, these three spheres may be perceived as influential on participants' learning during the educational development initiative. As previously discussed, participants' beliefs about reading and postsecondary instruction, as well as education literature and prior instructional practices, appeared to influence participants' instructional planning and implementation. Meaning making processes including reflection on student response to instruction, engagement with and reflection on group discussions, and differentiated coaching contributed to participants' perceptions of

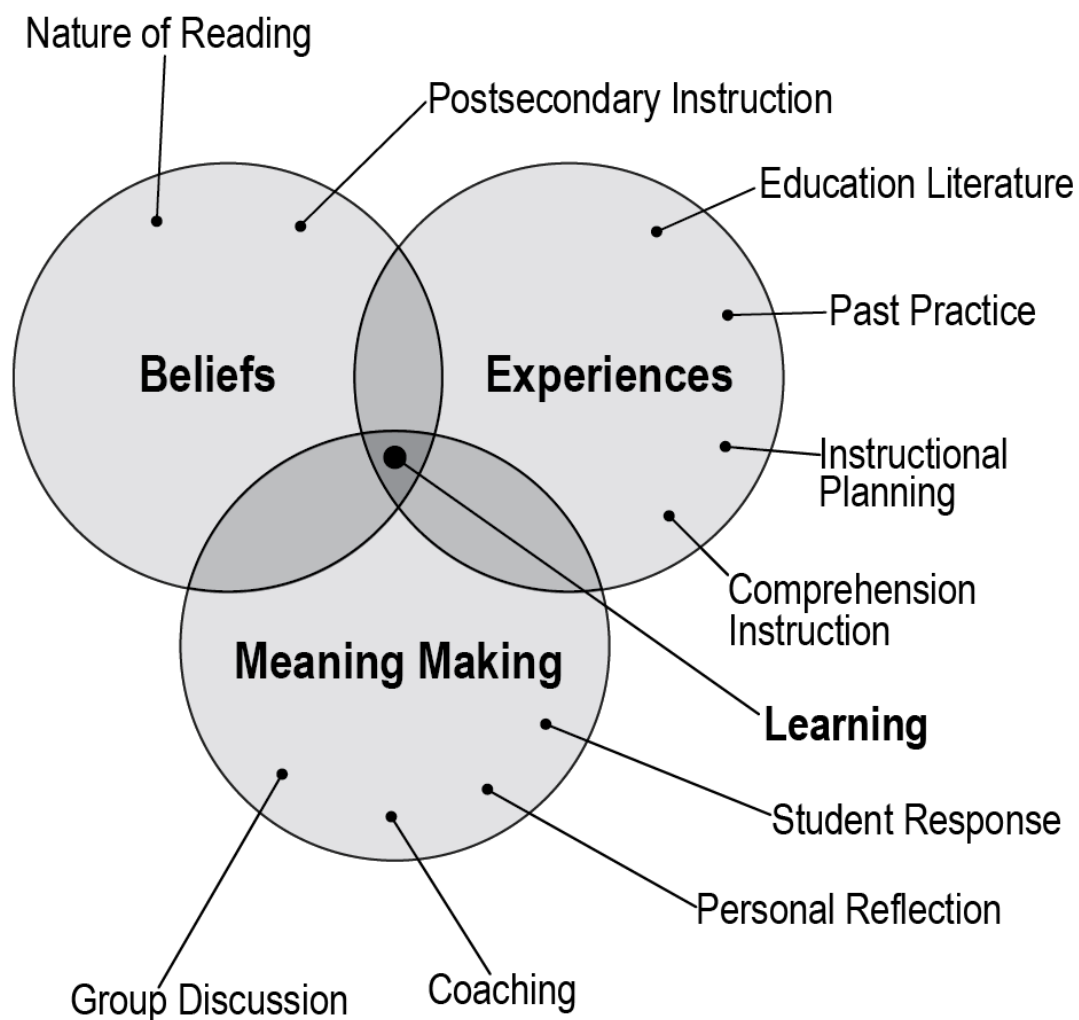


Figure 2. Spheres of influence on participants' learning.

learning and changed beliefs.

The importance of self in constructivist learning and teaching has been established in the literature (e.g., Gordon, 2008; Palmer, 2007; Phillips, 1997). Psychological constructivism, particularly, focuses on ways that individuals construct and store knowledge, often in contexts of social influences on that construction (Phillips, 1997). Gordon (2008) described learning as “an active and restless process that human beings undertake to make some sense of themselves, the world, and the relationships between the two” (p. 324). Gordon’s association of the importance of self in learning with Palmer’s (2007) concept of connectedness to self in teaching integrated a constructivist emphasis on meaning making with the importance of self-knowledge as a key component in the ability to evaluate one’s teaching practice and to communicate through that practice effectively. Palmer suggested that teaching is not simply a matter of information transmission, but rather a matter of negotiating self in a series of highly complex contexts such as student interactions, curriculum design, and, in this case, university environments.

The importance of the participants’ selves to their learning and teaching emerged during this study in at least three ways. First, it has been established that participants’ pre-existing beliefs about academic reading (that students should read actively and critically in ways similar to participants’ discipline-specific reading processes) and postsecondary instruction (that first- and second-year students need assistance with adjusting to the academic demands of university) appeared to emerge from their personal experiences. One interpretation is that through these beliefs, participants demonstrated commitment to their disciplinary approaches to reading and indicated a desire to assist

students to learn to read in ways they believed had led to their academic success. In this way, participants appeared to be sharing their selves with their students. Second, participants' experiences with planning and implementing comprehension instruction appeared to be influenced strongly by their own craft knowledge and that of their colleagues. As they described their instructional experiences, the importance of their beliefs about reading, teaching first- and second- year students, and their prior instructional approaches emerged. Participants drew on their beliefs and instructional successes as they prepared to address reading comprehension in their courses. Not surprisingly, they appeared to draw from what they knew, including their knowledge of themselves. Finally, as part of their ongoing meaning making processes, participants cited their appreciation for individualized interactions during the study (through differentiated coaching) and respectful facilitation, and thus indicated their preferences for personalized professional interactions that might maximize their learning in an educational development initiative.

Through their desire to share their selves with students, their incorporation of self-knowledge as well as disciplinary knowledge, and their appreciation for individualization during the educational development initiative, participants appeared to demonstrate some of the complexities of their investments of self in their teaching and learning. As participants' beliefs, experiences, and meaning making processes emerged from their selves, they also influenced learning in ways unique to the participants (e.g., Clement's belief in telling students how to read selectively, his somewhat disappointing experiences with quiz results, and his reflection on cause and effect during instruction contributed to his learning that comprehension instruction requires integration and repetition within

course contexts). Through its association with the complexities of participants' selves, each sphere of belief, experience, and meaning making brought complexities to the character of participants' learning during the initiative. Jarvis's (2006) theory of human learning recognizes the complexities of learning processes as they are associated with the whole person – body and mind – interacting with changes in the life-world that cause disjuncture. Types and intensities of learning may be influenced by the nature of individuals' acceptance, utilization, and memorization of new knowledge, appreciation, and skills.

Acknowledging the complexities of participants' learning, and in fact, of their engagement throughout the study, became important as the significance of their beliefs, experiences, and meaning making processes emerged. Participants appeared to engage with the initiative through engagement of their selves, an observation that supports the importance of inclusive, authentic conversations within constructivist frameworks during educational development (Amundsen & Wilson, 2012; Kitchen et al, 2008). Initiatives that prioritize collegiality, learning, and respect (Taylor & Colet, 2010) may honour the complex contexts through which professors participate in educational development.

Consideration of participants' investment of their selves during this initiative led to consideration of the roles of educational developers and ways in which they might acknowledge the personal nature and complexities of professors' teaching and learning processes. Given the strength of participants' investment of selves, and their positive responses to this faculty-focused initiative, the importance of acknowledging and honouring professors' selves through the design and facilitation of initiatives became

clear. Such acknowledgement and honour may influence participants' learning and contribute to perceptions of meaningful educational development.

### **Implications for Practice**

In light of the importance of acknowledging and honouring professors' selves within educational development design and facilitation, this section discusses implications for educational developers' practice. Several ways that the self may be acknowledged and honoured are mentioned, including exploration of professors' beliefs, demonstrated respect and consideration, and responsive communication. The section ends with discussion of potential contributions of this study to the literature.

The importance of university professors' beliefs to their teaching and learning has been highlighted during this study. As beliefs emerge from and influence life experiences (Jarvis, 2006) and specifically in educational contexts filter information, frame educational tasks, and guide actions (Fives & Buehl, 2012; Hora, 2014), they may be relevant to professors' teaching in terms of their thinking, approaches, intentions, and conceptions (Kane et al., 2002; Kember, 1997; McAlpine, Weston, Berthiaume, et al., 2006). In addition, beliefs influence the reception of information and experiences (Fives & Buehl, 2012) and are influenced by thinking, action, and reflection (McAlpine, Weston, Berthiaume, et al., 2006). Accordingly, the relevance of beliefs to learning may be an important consideration in the design of educational development for university professors. The emphasis on espoused beliefs in this study emerged as a positive focal point for individual interactions with the participants. Consistent with the literature, the findings of the study suggested that participants' beliefs contributed to their motivations, the complexities of their instructional planning, and the personalization of their teaching



approaches (Hora, 2014; Kember, 1997; Leatham, 2006; McAlpine, Weston, Berthiaume, et al., 2006; Van Driel et al., 1997). There appeared to be considerable overlap between participants' perceptions of their beliefs and knowledge (Fang, 1996; Jarvis, 2006) as indicated by their descriptions of prior learning and their teaching approaches. Both constructs (beliefs and knowledge) appeared to hold great importance for participants, which underscored the advisability of exploring them during personalized educational development.

Demonstrated respect for professors appears to be an established tenet of educational development models in which professors are seen as agentic learners (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; O'Meara et al, 2008), disciplinary experts (Dee & Daly, 2009), and colleagues of educational developers (Taylor & Colet, 2010). Several guidelines for ethical treatment of participants in qualitative research scenarios seem relevant when considering ways in which respect may be demonstrated during educational development. These include providing (a) clear explanations of initiatives and professors' anticipated roles, (b) gestures such as setting aside appropriate space and sufficient time for private and confidential conversations, and (c) assurance that professors may ask questions about any component of the initiative as it unfolds (Creswell, 2013).

The importance of understanding participants' preferences for types and scheduling of interactive formats became apparent across the two semesters of the study and can be associated with consideration of the local context and the needs of individuals in educational development programming (Taylor & Colet, 2010). In conjunction with preferences for individualized interactions, participants expressed a need for individualized scheduling. University professors can be viewed as members of several

personal and professional communities including their families, neighborhoods, departments, disciplinary organizations, and institutions. In this study, participants indicated that their time was fully scheduled and, thus, components of the initiative would need to be integrated within their existing calendars. This was most evident during scheduling of the group sessions, where two dates needed to be offered to accommodate all participants. Reflecting on professors' preferences for types and scheduling of interactions and incorporating as many options as possible may demonstrate respect for professors as well as commitment to co-constructive educational development.

During this study, consideration for participants' time constraints was also demonstrated through efficient facilitation during interactions, including articulating the purpose and scope of the interactions, planning an appropriate amount of content for each interaction, and working within time limits for meetings. Treating professors considerately also included active listening. Rather than assuming the content of professors' statements, waiting or planning the next response as they speak, following through with their ideas in subsequent comments, restatements, and summaries (Rice, 2011) may assure professors of educational developers' engagement with their ideas.

During an initiative, providing several platforms for communication available at a variety of times, including options for online and virtual discussions through formats such as email and Skype, may help to open and maintain lines of communication (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, responsive communication included attempting to share information and ideas with participants consistent with my perceptions of their needs, while simultaneously observing and listening to their responses, and adjusting content and methods of communications accordingly. In order to engage with responsive

communication, it was necessary to follow participants' thinking and learning processes as they expressed beliefs and ideas. As I desired to embrace the uncertain nature of qualitative research (Brown, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) and co-construct a multivoiced view of comprehension instruction (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), it became important to demonstrate willingness to respect participants' needs to initiate unplanned directions for conversations, even as I guided conversations with the goals of the interactions in mind.

This study may contribute to the literature on reading comprehension instruction as well as educational development. Other studies have described ways that university professors addressed reading comprehension instruction within their disciplinary courses. In one of those studies, Shepherd et al. (2009) formulated strategies important to reading mathematics texts that they believed would address gaps in their students' understanding, and thus established a foundation for further research in comprehension strategy instruction. In another study, Smith et al. (2010) tested the efficacy of employing elaborative interrogation while reading the dense content in science texts, and encouraged other science professors to consider providing such strategy instruction. While these studies lend credence to integrating comprehension instruction in discipline-specific courses, they do not extend discussion of the instruction to professors' planning and implementation, nor do they associate such instruction with possible supports available for professors through educational development. The study offered here may be useful for similar future instruction and related educational development initiatives. Specifically, in its emphasis on the importance of professors' complex investments of self in teaching and learning, this study may contribute to existing literature promoting

pragmatic initiative design. Additionally, the study may contribute to existing work on individualized educational development, particularly in differentiated coaching situations in which participants' beliefs are foregrounded.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

This section suggests limitations of the study and ways in which its scope could be expanded. It also suggests ways in which related studies could be aligned with existing research contexts, specifically those exploring professor and student interactions at the thresholds of early years of university learning. Along with generating recommendations for particular research directions, contextualization of this study raises questions relevant to students' and professors' experiences that might also be addressed in continuing research trajectories.

This exploratory case study provided a glimpse into five university professors' attempts to plan and integrate reading comprehension instruction in their discipline-specific first- and second-year courses within the context of an educational development initiative. One limitation of the study was the small number of participants working within a single university environment. Although small participant numbers are typical in case study research (Yin, 2009), further research might include conducting additional studies with greater numbers of participants across multiple campuses in order to gain a broader perspective on professors' beliefs. These studies might contribute to a more comprehensive portrait of professors' academic reading processes, prior instructional practices, and experiences with comprehension instruction. Time constraints of this study limited it to two semesters, whereas a longer study might have offered additional insights as professors refined their comprehension instructional approaches and worked with

differing student groups over time (e.g., the nature of intersections and interactions among professors, and among professors and students). As qualitative research seeks to provide accounts of participants' experiences that are as complex, multifaceted, and holistic as possible (Creswell, 2013), further research could involve longitudinal studies of professors' implementation of comprehension instruction over several years that might reveal patterns of instructional change. Finally, this study focused on professors in context of their work with first- and second-year students with an appreciation that students are likely to experience challenges as they transition from familiar instructional environments to university study (Cohen, 2008; Conley, 2007; Gruenbaum, 2012; Hoeft, 2012; Paulson & Armstrong, 2011; Wingate, 2007). However, as participants suggested, upper-year students might also benefit from discussion of reading comprehension in their courses as they transition through increasingly difficult reading scenarios, an observation consistent with Alexander's (2005) model of reading development across the lifespan. Further research might include students in upper-year courses and focus on ways that professors might assist them in ongoing development of reading comprehension.

In addition to expanding the scope of this particular study, extensions of this line of inquiry could contribute to larger research contexts situated at the threshold of students' transitions to university and relevant to educational development contexts. At a time when most students are expected to attend postsecondary institutions (Côté & Allahar, 2011) yet may not be fully prepared to engage in independent academic study (Popovic & Green, 2012; Tagg, 2003), and where many professors expect first- and second-year students to process information deeply, engage actively, and contribute meaningfully to discussions and written arguments (Maclellan, 2015; Sappington et al.,

2002; Svensson et al., 2009), ongoing research is needed to explore the complexities of student-professor interactions.

One of these complexities concerns reading in academic contexts. The study presented here described one possible approach to addressing students' and professors' challenges with student comprehension and noncompliance with assigned readings. The notion of addressing reading comprehension within academic courses, however, raises many questions, including students' responsibility for their own reading and learning. Does offering support in reading during discipline-specific instruction sacrifice time that should be spent on other course content? Should students address their reading challenges independently? While it has been found that professors may be suited to providing discipline-specific assistance (Nel et al., 2004; Waters, 2003), and that such assistance offered in discipline-specific courses may be more effective than in standalone formats (Bailey, 2013; Chanock et al., 2012; Taraban et al., 2000), to what degree can such assistance be considered effective, and how should degrees of effectiveness be evaluated? Dialogue on the extent and situation of assistance with reading in university environments can only be strengthened by additional research exploring these questions and others. Additionally, due to their shared concerns with student-professor interactions at the intersection of transitions to university, related research trajectories such as the first-year experience, student preparedness, and student retention might also be enriched as a result of such ongoing discussions.

In addition to questions about the nature of academic reading assistance, further questions emerge when considering professors' involvement with this assistance. For example, does offering assistance with reading comprehension add yet another burden to

a long list of increasing responsibilities within academic roles (Kreber, 2010; O'Meara et al., 2008), or does it provide one viable way to address concerns about students entering university? If professors lack background in comprehension instruction, is it reasonable to assume that they should gain that background in order to offer assistance to their students? What is the nature of the background they should acquire, and which institutional supports should be put in place to assist them? What role should universities play in providing appropriate educational development dedicated to reading comprehension instruction or other areas of study? Discussing these issues with professors and educational developers to ascertain their attitudes and to gauge the nature of supports required for those who wish to offer comprehension assistance might serve as a reasonable first step in moving toward exploring this approach from professors' perspectives more fully.

Discussions and studies such as these could be conducted in association with established research programs such as the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), "a distinctive form of research that is shaped by multi-disciplinary contexts and focuses on practice-driven institutional/curricula/classroom inquiries with an explicit transformational agenda" (Hubball & Clarke, 2010, p. 1). This study shows kinship with SoTL in its focus on teaching and learning, evidence-based approaches, discussion across disciplines, and utilization of reflection (Kreber, 2006). Continuing studies emergent from professors' concerns within their teaching practices could be enhanced by the SoTL emphases on collaboration and communication (Hubball & Clarke, 2010) that are often present in educational development initiatives. Aligning initiatives focused on student-professor interactions during early years of university study with the SoTL research

agenda could engage scholars in further cross-disciplinary discussions and contribute to a creative and growing body of knowledge about professors' instructional practices (Grauerholz & Zipp, 2008; Hubball & Clarke, 2010).

### **Personal Reflection**

This section provides a reflection on my experiences as invested facilitator, colleague, and co-creator of knowledge during this study. Even as I asked participants to engage in content, process, and premise reflection (Kreber, 2006), I needed to engage in similar forms of reflection in order to contribute to co-construction of knowledge. These reflective processes were ongoing throughout the initiative (e.g., through development of reflective and analytical memos) and can be described in terms of beliefs and perceived realization of intentions associated with the study's design.

#### **Beliefs**

Prior to the study, I had worked with many colleagues who expressed concerns over students' reading abilities and performance. Frequently, expression of these concerns seemed to involve blaming either the K-12 system or the students themselves for their perceived unpreparedness for university study. While I shared my colleagues' concerns, I believed that professors could address reading comprehension within their discipline-specific courses, and that integrating such instruction could provide a proactive alternative to blaming students or their teachers for perceived reading deficits. It also made sense to me that if students entering universities were unfamiliar with reading extended arguments written in complex language, they would have no way of suddenly acquiring the skills to do so independently, particularly if they were overwhelmed by the adjustment to life in tertiary education. Conducting this research provided an opportunity



to combine these beliefs at an intersection of professors' and students' experiences during the early years of university study.

The site for research emerged from the context of my employment, as did propositions that informed the study's design (Yin, 2009). Through working with my colleagues, I had gained a sense of professors' struggles to maintain their intellectual roles in the face of advancing corporatization (Donoghue, 2008; Nussbaum, 2010; Readings, 1999; Washburn, 2005) and developed a belief that assisting students to read complex materials so that they could participate in discussions and write about their ideas more effectively might, in fact, work toward maintaining some of the intellectuality professors sought in their courses. Having the opportunity to facilitate a study within a familiar environment with small classes and professors whom I perceived as caring strengthened my belief that attempting to integrate comprehension instruction in first- and second-year courses could be viable.

As the study unfolded, it struck me immediately that the participants were exceptional professors in an unusual position that not only made them suitable for the study, but underscored the complexities of their teaching roles. I was aware of their extensive institutional and personal commitments to their own research and other academic pursuits, yet they willingly and generously contributed to a long-term study and appeared to make genuine attempts to help their students during the initiative. Although all participants shared similar commitments to students, I witnessed an impressive variety of teaching foci and approaches in action, seemingly influenced by disciplinary-based concerns and decisions. Participants appeared to possess growth mindsets, as they believed that their teaching abilities could improve and their students' comprehension of

assigned readings could increase (Dweck, 2014). They also displayed “grit” associated with growth mindsets, as they reflected on their experiences and persisted with comprehension instruction, even in the face of somewhat discouraging results (Dweck, 2014, p.10). Participants inspired me to avoid reductionist interpretations of their actions and beliefs, as they were complex thinkers who approached problem solving in complex ways that defied simple assignation of labels describing their teaching practices.

As participants designed and implemented their reading comprehension instruction, my own instructional approach was challenged. Previously, I had presented a cumulative repertoire of comprehension strategies in a first-year course (see Parr & Woloshyn, 2013). The participants’ commitments to practical applications for their instruction and immediate relevance to course readings caused me to rethink some of the strategies I had presented. Consequently, I planned to revisit the number of strategies I included in my own instruction and to sharpen the contexts in which students would practice the strategies in my courses. Most importantly, it was reconfirmed for me that reading comprehension instruction should be designed with the professor, the course, and perceptions of students’ needs in mind. Evidence-based pedagogy can provide a helpful resource for instructional options, but the actual instructional planning needs to come from those who will implement it so that they can communicate it passionately and relevantly to their students.

As I reflected on ways that my academic biography was enriched throughout the study (Jarvis, 2006), I was able to articulate beliefs that were confirmed and intensified (e.g., that professors can integrate comprehension instruction in their courses), but I became aware of difficulty in articulating changes in my beliefs. Beliefs and knowledge

may overlap in an individual's mind and experience (Jarvis, 2006), and I found it easier to articulate growth in understanding (e.g., becoming aware of new ideas for comprehension instruction) than I did to analyze my perceptions of growth in beliefs. Although I am certain that my craft knowledge was enriched during this study, and I am aware of factors that may have influenced my beliefs (e.g., teaching experience, the academic environment, colleagues), I learned that it is difficult to isolate, identify, and articulate specific growth, particularly immediately following a study. This realization increased my appreciation for participants' efforts to reflect upon their own beliefs and to engage in meaning making associated with the study, particularly as it involved changes in their beliefs. It also served as a reminder to tread carefully and thoughtfully during analysis of educational development as beliefs may, indeed, be difficult to articulate and often unrecognizable (Jarvis, 2006).

While I found it difficult to articulate specific changes in my beliefs as a result of the study, I did experience expansion of my professional interests, relevant both to practice and research. Prior to this study, my background had been focused primarily on teaching first-year students, but as I worked with the participants to explore their experiences, I became aware of some of the benefits of educational development practice. These included mutual sharing of insights and opportunities to assist professors with educational concerns. As an invested facilitator and colleague in this study, I recognized potential opportunities for ongoing exploration of professors' experiences within a variety of educational development contexts. One of the most promising contexts appears to be differentiated coaching, in which I would like to explore further the benefits of

meeting professors where they are professionally and working with them individually in order to address various aspects of their teaching practices.

### **Realization of Intentions**

While ultimate evaluation of the study's success must lie with the participants and others who judge it, it is to some extent possible to analyze progress in realization of the intentions for the study. The primary intention was to integrate respect for professors' autonomy, disciplinary expertise, personal approaches to teaching, and individual beliefs about reading, with a practical initiative that would provide relevant instruction while maintaining course content. The design of the study reflected this intention in that it encouraged participants to bring beliefs and prior instructional approaches forward to their comprehension instructional planning. All participants believed that their instruction was relevant, although some found integration of that instruction more straightforward than others. Ultimately, I believe that the primary intention was realized, but in the process some risks inherent in this approach emerged.

As I had positioned myself as an invested facilitator and colleague and, therefore, a co-creator of knowledge in this study, slight tensions emerged as my commitment to inclusion of all teaching approaches was complicated by differences between participants' styles and my own. It was inevitable that participants' various definitions of good teaching and mine might not be similar, but it became somewhat challenging at times to follow development of comprehension instruction when, for example, some participants were less structured in their teaching approaches than I am, or some were more focused on assessment than I would have been. To the extent that I was aware of the biases with which I interpreted participants' teaching approaches, and with a desire to

take a “non-judgmental, sensitive, and respectful” stance (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 130), I attempted to focus more on their perceptions than on my own through processes of reflection and attempts to bracket my personal assumptions and biases (Maritz & Jooste, 2011). As an invested facilitator and colleague, however, I did insert questions or suggest options that I believed were relevant and worthy of consideration and, as participants responded, we collectively constructed new knowledge about comprehension instruction. I attempted to demonstrate my commitment to participants’ planning of their own instruction by selecting relevant information from the literature that appeared to complement their teaching styles.

Taking this nondirectional approach, however, raised questions about the nature and scope of learning associated with the study. Might the flexibility of my approach inadvertently have discouraged participants from stretching their beliefs: in other words, by following the participants’ lead in their instructional planning rather than promoting another form of evidence-based strategy instruction more insistently (e.g., direct instruction of a repertoire of reading strategies), did I inadvertently prevent them from considering alternative approaches to addressing comprehension instruction? Although there are no definitive answers, it seemed more important to meet participants where they were in terms of beliefs and instructional approaches as they developed comprehension instruction than it did to ask them to follow an unfamiliar approach. Asking participants to identify goals and a focus for the initiative relevant to their courses, supporting them as they developed instructional plans, and exploring their beliefs during these processes allowed us all to learn about various approaches to comprehension instruction associated with different disciplines and was consistent with the psychological constructivist

approach central to the initiative. This approach was also consistent with educational development literature promoting recognition of professors' agency (O'Meara et al., 2008), the benefits of authentic conversations about teaching (Eddy & Mitchell, 2011; Kitchen et al., 2008) and provision of ongoing, knowledgeable support (Dee & Daly, 2009). Ultimately, one of the benefits of taking a nondirectional approach to educational development was the necessity to confront and contextualize my own biases. Attempting to do so sharpened my perceptions of my own and the participants' experiences.

Another of the study's intentions related to co-construction of knowledge involved decentralizing my role as researcher in an attempt to encourage open dialogue with and among participants. While viewing interviews and group sessions as "negotiated accomplishments" (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 717) was advantageous to a research situation in which gleaning the maximum amount of information was desirable, it also appeared to be advantageous to educational development. While the participants acknowledged my role as scheduler and organizer of our interactions and they demonstrated good will by responding to all interview and group prompts fully, they also indicated desire to become fully engaged with exploration of their ideas and appeared to demonstrate active commitment to knowledge construction. Consequently, participants elaborated on interview protocols and followed their own trains of thought as we explored their experiences and perspectives. While this open dialogue took time, it also provided opportunities for participants to discuss ideas fully and clarify instructional plans and beliefs. By the third interview, when participants and I shared the advantage of history in the initiative, we were able to explore their learning and ideas for further comprehension instruction more openly and fully than we could have at the beginning of

the study. Ultimately, the rapport that we developed contributed to the open dialogue important for deep understanding in a co-constructive environment (McDermid et al., 2014).

### **Conclusion**

The study presented here described an educational development initiative aligned with best practices in process-oriented, faculty-focused initiative design (Amundsen & Wilson, 2012; O'Meara et al., 2008). The multivoiced findings of the study may offer insights into educational development, as well as reading comprehension and its instruction, relevant to student-professor interactions located within transitional learning situations. More broadly, the study is concerned with the quality of interactions among students, professors, and educational developers and, therefore, may contribute to work focused on the primacy of relationships in learning, teaching, and educational development. Through identification of the importance of acknowledging and honouring complexities of professors' investments of self in their teaching and learning, this study offers a perspective that prioritizes caring interactions. Educational development in which such interactions are enacted may promote relationships that support co-construction of active and meaningful learning for students, professors, and educational developers.

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## **Appendix A**

### **First Interview Questions**

1. Could we start by your telling me about yourself – your educational background, how you came to teach in this university?
  - Which courses are you teaching this year?
2. What do you see as your duties and responsibilities as an instructor of [first or second] year students? Does teaching these students require any specific preparation or interaction different from teaching other students?

**As you know, this study is about professors' beliefs:**

**Beliefs about reading can be defined as opinions or assumptions that have emerged from experiences and inform knowledge and values.**

**The next questions are about your experiences with reading and the ways you conceive reading comprehension in your academic discipline.**

3. How would you describe yourself as a reader in general and as a reader in your discipline specifically?
4. Can you describe texts typical to your discipline and ways that you approach reading them?
5. What are some of the challenges of reading text in your discipline?
6. Has the way you read in the discipline changed over the years - from when you were an undergraduate student to now?

**These questions are about you as an instructor who assigns reading in your first/second year courses:**

7. What types and how much reading do you typically assign per week?
8. Do you assign any print-based reading? Do you assign any online reading? If so, do you think that students read online materials differently than they do materials in print?
9. What are your expectations about students completing readings before they come to class?

10. How do you know that students comprehend the assigned readings? How do you know that students do not comprehend the readings? Can you provide examples?
11. Can you talk about your students' strengths and challenges with respect to reading in your [first or second] year courses?
12. Do you think your [first or second] year students need help with their reading comprehension? If so, what kinds of assistance or support with reading comprehension do you think might be useful? Ideally, what would that assistance look like?

**Finally, a question about your participation in this research:**

13. Do you have any goals for your participation in this educational development initiative? For example, would you like to learn particular things about reading comprehension or instruction?
  - Do you have specific goals in terms of your own instruction or your professional interactions?

## Appendix B

### Second Interview Questions

Questions were individualized for each participant

1. The purpose of this second interview is twofold: to talk about your responses to the first interview and group session (in terms of your own thinking about reading comprehension and first-year students), as well as to talk about your ideas for implementing some form of comprehension instruction in your course.
  - a. By way of clarification, in our first interview you mentioned.... Could you talk more about...?
  - b. Is there anything else from the interview that you would like to clarify or explain further?
2. In our first interview, you described yourself as a professor who believes that... (summarize description of self as professor and provide specific examples)
  - a. During our group session, I'm wondering if you found any similarities between your approach to teaching and others'
  - b. Did you feel that your approach differs from the other participants' in any significant ways?
    - i. If so, do you think the similarities or differences are a function of experience, or discipline, or something else – can you attribute a cause?
  - c. Did you find any of the comments made during the session surprising or thought provoking – has anything stayed with you?
    - i. For example, you have said that you'd like to learn... - did anything during the session shed light on...?
3. At the beginning of the group session I outlined ideas from three articles: the first was Patricia Alexander's work on reading development across the lifespan; the second was Holschuh and Aultman's chapter on comprehension in university students; and the last was the article on teaching specific comprehension strategies in first year courses.
  - a. If you have had time to review any of these ideas in the articles, I'm wondering if there is anything that has stood out for you

4. I also sent along a couple of other articles on comprehension: one, the Swedish study on undergraduate practices and attitudes toward reading; and two, the... (article specific to discipline or expressed interest)
  - a. If you've had a chance to review either or both of these articles, were there any ideas that stood out for you – for example, did you find any ideas on teaching comprehension that were interesting?
    - i. Did the (disciplinary) article provide any insights?
5. It may be early to ask you this, but over-all, are you aware of any changes in your thinking about reading since we began this study in September?
6. Are you aware of any changes in your beliefs around teaching first year students?

**The second purpose of this interview is to talk about what you might like to do for your comprehension instruction –**

- **You've mentioned that you... (summary of ways the participant addresses reading comprehension in class currently)**
  - i. **Is this a fair summary of ways you pay attention to students' comprehension already? Have I left anything out?**
- 7. Given your awareness of students' comprehension and what you think they need to learn, have you identified another area you might like to work on in your comprehension instruction in... (course name)?
  - a. Other ideas (if needed):
    - i. You indicated interest in... (ask whether an expressed interest could be a focal point for instruction)
- 8. Can we talk about
  - Instructional approaches?
  - Integration of these approaches with existing course content?
  - Any foreseeable challenges?
- 9. What can I do to support you as you plan this comprehension instruction?

## Appendix C

### Third Interview Questions

Questions were individualized for each participant

1. Could you start by completing the story of your comprehension instruction project – we started with... (brief summary of description during the second all-participant session)
  - What happened after that?
  - Maybe we can talk about each element – ... (go through each step as described by the participant to ask for details and clarification)
  - a. How comfortable were you with addressing comprehension in your course? Did you expect this level of comfort?
  - b. What are your impressions of student responses to your instruction/focus? Did you expect these responses?
  - c. Can you talk about one insight you have gained during your comprehension project?
  - d. What do you perceive as successes during this instruction?
  - e. What do you perceive as challenges?
  - f. Did you have the information you needed to work on your project confidently? Would any other supports have been useful?

**That brings us to questions about your experience with the research study itself:  
Can you talk about your experience with the study over-all:**

2. Which elements of this educational development experience have influenced you the most? The least?
3. Have your beliefs around teaching first year students changed at all during this study?
4. Have your beliefs around teaching reading comprehension changed?
5. Have any of your experiences influenced your thinking about future instruction in your courses?
6. During the first interview we talked about goals for your participation in this initiative: you mentioned then that you would like to learn... (review stated goals). How would you characterize your attainment of these goals?
7. Do you have any other comments about your experiences during this study?



## Appendix D

### Articles Sent to Participants

- Alexander, P. A. (2005). The path to competence: A lifespan developmental perspective on reading. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 37(4), 413-436. doi: 10.1207/s15548430jlr3704\_1
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- Pecorari, D., Shaw, P., Irvine, A., Malmström, H., & Mežek, S. (2012). Reading in tertiary education: Undergraduate student practices and attitudes. *Quality in Higher Education*, 18(2), 235-256. doi: 10.1080/13538322.2012.706464
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- Sappington, J., Kinsey, K., & Munsayac, K. (2002). Two studies of reading compliance among college students. *Teaching of Psychology*, 29(4), 272-274.
- Scholes, R. (2002). Commentary: The transition to college reading. *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture*, 2(2), 165-172.
- Strauss, S. L., Goodman, K. S., & Paulson, E. J. (2009). Brain research and reading: How emerging concepts in neuroscience support a meaning construction view of the reading process. *Educational Research and Review*, 4(2), 21-33.

## Appendix E

### Brock University Ethics Clearance Letter



Brock University  
Research Ethics Office  
Tel: 905-688-5550 ext. 3035  
Email: reb@brocku.ca

Social Science Research Ethics Board

#### Certificate of Ethics Clearance for Human Participant Research

DATE: 7/19/2013  
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: WOLOSHYN, Vera  
Education  
FILE: 12-294 - WOLOSHYN  
TYPE: Ph. D. STUDENT: Cynthia Parr  
SUPERVISOR: Vera Woloshyn  
TITLE: Implementation of Reading Comprehension Instruction in First and Second Year Courses: Exploring Changes in University Instructors' Beliefs and Conceptions

#### ETHICS CLEARANCE GRANTED

Type of Clearance: NEW

Expiry Date: 7/31/2014

The Brock University Social Sciences Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above named research proposal and considers the procedures, as described by the applicant, to conform to the University's ethical standards and the Tri-Council Policy Statement. Clearance granted from 7/19/2013 to 7/31/2014.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored by, at a minimum, an annual report. Should your project extend beyond the expiry date, you are required to submit a Renewal form before 7/31/2014. Continued clearance is contingent on timely submission of reports.

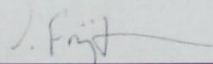
To comply with the Tri-Council Policy Statement, you must also submit a final report upon completion of your project. All report forms can be found on the Research Ethics web page at <http://www.brocku.ca/research/policies-and-forms/research-forms>.

In addition, throughout your research, you must report promptly to the REB:

- a) Changes increasing the risk to the participant(s) and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the study;
- b) All adverse and/or unanticipated experiences or events that may have real or potential unfavourable implications for participants;
- c) New information that may adversely affect the safety of the participants or the conduct of the study;
- d) Any changes in your source of funding or new funding to a previously unfunded project.

We wish you success with your research.

Approved:

  
Jan Frijters, Chair  
Social Sciences Research Ethics Board

**Note:** Brock University is accountable for the research carried out in its own jurisdiction or under its auspices and may refuse certain research even though the REB has found it ethically acceptable.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of research at that site.